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M'rashtra to launch 'innovation city' inspired by Gujarat's GIFT

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BUSINESS

Mkts extend gains for 3rd day on strong global cues

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SPORTS

Sindhu, Kiran enter quarterfinals

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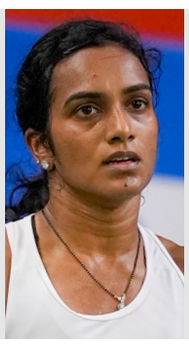

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڵار روزنامەی بنگلور

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Hindenburg shuts after hard blow to Adani

WASHINGTON / NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Hindenburg Research, which made international waves with campaigns targeting billionaire Gautam Adani that wiped billions of dollars from the market value of his group companies, will disband, its founder Nate Anderson announced on Thursday.

The announcement by Anderson, 40, who started the company in 2017, came days before Donald Trump's inauguration as the new US President.

Anderson cited the toll of the "rather intense, and at times, all encompassing" nature of the work as the reason for his decision. However, critics were quick to link the development to Hindenburg's alleged ties with George Soros and the so-called deep state being under significant pressure from the incoming Trump administration.

Adani Group CFO Jugeshinder Robbie Singh, in a cryptic post on X, said, "Kitne Ghazi Aaye, Kitne Ghazi Gaye."

Typically, short-sellers like Anderson, who managed his firm's own money but not that of others, bet against companies they believe are plagued with mismanagement or involved in some fraud/scam. They borrow a stock to sell it in the expectation the price will fall, then repurchase the shares and pocket the difference.

Hindenburg in January 2023 published a report accusing the Adani Group of "pulling the largest con in the corporate history", wiping out more than USD 150B in value of the group's shares at their lowest point.

Adani Group vehemently denied all allegations, including that of being "engaged in a brazen stock manipulation and accounting fraud scheme over the course of decades" and improper use of offshore tax havens to shore up group share prices. *—PTI*

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Hindenburg Research Founder Nate Anderson **PHOTO: X**

NEET-UG TO BE HELD IN PEN, PAPER MODE

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

The Centre has decided against conducting the medical entrance exam NEET-UG in online mode for now, and announced on Thursday it will continue to be conducted in pen and paper mode.

The decision comes after detailed deliberations between education and health ministries on whether to conduct the NEET-UG in pen and paper mode or online mode.

"NEET-UG shall be conducted in a single day and shift," a senior National Testing Agency (NTA) official said on Thursday.

The National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) is the largest entrance exam in the country in terms of number of candidates appearing for the test. In 2024, a record more than 24 lakh candidates took the exam.

The NTA conducts the NEET every year for admission into medical colleges. A total of 1,08,000 seats are available for MBSS course.

The idea of switching to Computer-Based Test (CBT) mode for NEET is not new and has been deliberated several times before. However, the push for the exam reforms came following the paper leak controversy last year. *—PTI*

India becomes 4th nation to dock satellites in space

ISRO conducted space-docking of satellites under SpaDex

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

In a major boost to India's ambitious future space missions, ISRO on Thursday successfully performed the docking of satellites as part of the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) and announced that post docking, control of two satellites as a single object was also achieved.

With the successful docking of satellites — Chaser and Target — India has become the fourth country after the US, Russia and China to accomplish the technological feat.

In space, docking technology is essential when multiple rocket launches are required to achieve common mission objectives.

The docking experiment is crucial for Chandrayaan-4, Gaganyaan, setting up a space station and landing an astronaut on the moon.

Last October, the government announced that India will have its own Space Station by 2035.

Further, ISRO said: "Post docking, control of two satellites as a single object is successful. Undocking and power transfer checks to follow in coming days."

ISRO Chairman V Narayanan too congratulated the team which made the mission successful.

Earlier on 12 January, ISRO brought the two spacecraft to 3m and then moved them back to a safe distance in its trial attempt to dock the satellites.

ISRO successfully launched the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) mission on 30 December, 2024. The PSLV C60 rocket carrying two small satellites, SDX01 (Chaser) and SDX02 (Target), along with 24 payloads, had lifted off from the first launchpad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, and about 15 minutes after liftoff, the two small spacecraft weighing about 220kg each were launched into a 475-km circular orbit as intended.

According to ISRO, the SpaDeX mission is a cost-effective technology demonstrator mission for the demonstration of in-space docking using two small spacecraft that were launched by PSLV. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ISRO

- According to ISRO, the SpaDeX mission is a cost-effective technology demonstrator mission for in-space docking using two small spacecraft that were launched by PSLV.

'LAW UPHOLDS RIGHTS'

Congress moves SC to oppose pleas against Worship Law

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Congress on Thursday moved Supreme Court to intervene in cases filed against the validity Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act 1991, which preserves the character of religious places as they existed on August 15, 1947.

The party, which was instrumental in introducing and passing the Act, argues that it reflects the mandate of the Indian people and is vital for safeguarding secularism.

In an application filed by Congress leader KC Venugopal, the party said that the Act, passed by a Congress-led government with Janata Dal support, protects religious freedom and communal harmony.

The plea said that the 1991 law upholds fundamental rights under Articles 25, 26, 27, and 28, making it within Parliament's jurisdiction to enact.

It seeks to intervene and defend the Act's constitutional validity in response to petitions challenging Sections 3 and 4, which prohibit altering the religious nature of places of worship.

Supreme Court is hearing petitions that argue the Act violates fundamental rights like equality and religious freedom. The court had previously restrained lower courts from passing orders or registering new suits over religious structures while the case is under review. Among those challenging the Act are BJP leader Subramanian Swamy, former MP Chintamani Malviya, and religious figures like Devkinandan Thakur. They argue the Act limits their right to restore places of worship destroyed by invaders. *—PTI*

Congress leader KC Venugopal **PHOTO: PTI**

8th Pay Commission approved

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday approved setting up the 8th Pay Commission to revise salaries of nearly 50 lakh central government employees and allowances of 65 lakh pensioners. The chairman and two members of the Commission will be appointed soon, I&B Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told reporters here. "Prime Minister has approved 8th Central Pay Commission for central government employees," the minister said. The term of the 7th Pay Commission will end in 2026. The 7th Pay Commission was constituted in 2014 and its recommendations were implemented on 1 January, 2016. *—PTI*

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FLOWER SHOW IS HERE!

Visitors at the 217th Flower Show at Lalbagh in Bengaluru, part of Republic Day celebrations, on Thursday. The show is open to the public until 27 January **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

12 NAXALS GUNNED DOWN IN CHHATTISGARH

BIJAPUR, 16 JAN

As many as 12 Naxalites were killed in a fierce encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Thursday, a senior police official said.

The gunfight broke out at around 9 am in a forest of south Bijapur when a joint team of security personnel was out an anti-Naxalite operation and the intermittent exchange of fire lasted till late in the evening, he said.

Personnel belonging to the state police's District Reserve Guard (DRG) from three districts, five battalions of CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action - an elite jungle warfare unit of the CRPF) and the 229th battalion of CRPF were involved in the operation, he said.

With this, 26 Naxalites have been gunned down in separate encounters in the state so far this month. Last year, 219 Naxalites were neutralised by security forces. *—PTI*

Robbers shoot man dead, steal ₹93L from Bidar ATM

BIDAR, 16 JAN

In a shocking incident in Bidar, miscreants opened fire on staff members from the State Bank of India (SBI) as they arrived to deposit cash into an ATM. The incident occurred outside the SBI head office, resulting in the immediate death of a staff member, identified as Giri Venkatesh.

Another victim, Shivakumar, 26, suffered severe injuries and was rushed to BIMS Hospital in Bidar for emergency treatment. The attackers targeted a vehicle used for cash deposits, and, during the assault, they threw powdered salt into the staff members' eyes before firing five rounds and making off with an estimated Rs 93 lakh.

District Superintendent of Police Pradeep Gunti confirmed that the shooting took place around 11am when the assailants, riding a motorcycle, attacked the bank staff.

The robbers, who fled to Telangana after the Bidar heist, entered a travel office in Afzalganj, Hyderabad, where they shot the manager before escaping. According to sources, Bidar police, tracking the robbers, arrived in Hyderabad to apprehend them. Upon spotting the police, the robbers barged into the travel office in an attempt to flee, leading to a confrontation. During the exchange of gunfire, the manager of the office was shot and sustained serious injuries.

Home Minister G Parameshwar assured the public that the perpetrators would be apprehended as early as possible. He emphasised the necessity of installing security cameras and deploying security personnel whenever cash is being transported to ATMs. In response to the tragedy, District In-charge Minister Ishwar Khandre announced plans to visit the victim's family in 17 January to offer condolences, stating that an investigation would uncover what went awry in the security arrangement for cash deposits. *—Salar News*

The attackers targeted a vehicle used for cash deposits **PHOTO: SALAR**

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

BBMP gets ₹413.71 cr to upgrade hospitals

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

Karnataka Cabinet on Thursday approved a Rs 413.71 crore project to upgrade the hospitals operated by the Bengaluru civic agency under the 'Brand Bengaluru' scheme. Under this scheme, the dilapidated buildings would be replaced with new ones. According to him, 13 BBMP hospitals would be upgraded to 30-bed and five as 50-bed hospitals. *—PTI*

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ATTEMPTED ROBBERY AT BANDRA FLAT

Saif stabbed 6 times by intruder who demanded ₹1cr

MUMBAI, 16 JAN

Bollywood star Saif Ali Khan was repeatedly stabbed by an intruder in his highrise apartment in Bandra on Thursday.

The 54-year-old, who received six stab injuries, including in his neck, was out of danger following an emergency surgery at the Lilavati Hospital where he was taken in an auto after the attack outside his younger son Jeh's room around 2.30 am.

Khan, his wife, Kareena Kapoor and their two sons, Jeh and Taimur - were home in the 12th floor apartment along with five house helps. Police said, Jeh's nanny Eliyama Philip, who first encountered the armed attacker, said he asked for Rs 1 crore.

The intruder did not force his entry or break into the actor's flat but sneaked in at night with the intention of robbery, police said. Philip said she was sleeping on the floor in Jeh's room and woke up around 2am when she heard a sound and saw a man move towards Jeh. Panicked, she rushed to pick him up and was pushed away by the man, armed with a wooden stick and a long Hexa blade.

"In the scuffle, he attacked me with the blade. I got injured on my wrist," she said.

Hearing her scream, Khan and Kareena rushed out of their room. The intruder, who Philip said was be-tween 35-40 years old, then attacked Khan with a knife.

During the commotion, another house help also rushed out to raise an alarm. The intruder then ran away.

At least 10 police teams were formed to nab the suspect.

A 2.5-inch piece of the blade was removed from Khan's spine, doctors at the Lilavati Hospital said. Khan had been shifted to the ICU and could be moved out to a room in a day or two, he said. *—PTI*

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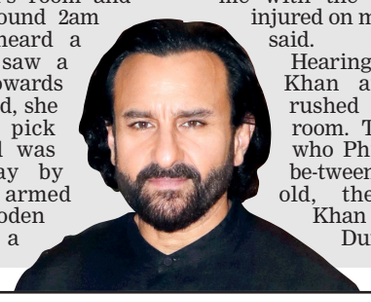
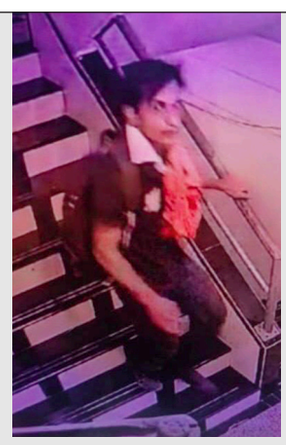




CCTV footage shows intruder escaping through staircase

₹23 crore cannabis seized at KIA, 3 arrested

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

The Bengaluru Customs officials have arrested three passengers at the Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) for smuggle 23kg of hydroponic cannabis — valued approximately at Rs 23 crore – from Bangkok to the city.

According to a statement issued by the Bengaluru Customs on Thursday, Special Intelligence and Investigation Branch officials, who had received specific inputs from the Airport and Air Cargo Complex at the KIA, on 9 January intercepted the passengers who arrived from Bangkok. A search of their baggage revealed multiple packets containing 23kg of hydroponic cannabis, the statement said.

Hydroponic cannabis, also known as hydro weed, are grown using hydroponics technology, a method of growing plants in water instead of soil.—*PTI*

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Darshan requests cops to let him keep his gun

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

Actor Darshan Thoogudeepa has appealed to the City police to allow him to keep his licensed firearm, citing security concerns associated with his celebrity status.

The actor was recently asked to surrender his weapon at the nearest police station, after a notice was issued to cancel his gun license. In a letter addressed to Deputy Commissioner of Police (Administration) Padmini Sahoo, Darshan stressed the necessity of keeping his firearm for personal safety. "I'm a celebrity and would require my licensed gun for safety purposes. I request the Bengaluru Police not to cancel my gun license," the actor wrote. The cancellation of his gun licence is part of legal procedure related to the Renukaswamy murder case, in which he is an accused. —*Salar News*

Mangaluru cops dispose drugs worth over ₹6 cr

MANGALURU, 16 JAN

Mangaluru Police have disposed of drugs seized within the city limits in the last year, worth around Rs 6 crore 80 lakh, according to the police. The police disposed of the drugs at the Mulki Industrial Area. "Today, with the court's permission, we are disposing of drugs seized in 2024 and some from 2023. We do every year," Mangalore Police Commissioner Anupam Agrawal told ANI on Thursday. "We are disposing of drugs seized in 37 cases, that is around 335 kg marijuana, 6.5 kg MDMA, and 16 grams cocaine, valuing around Rs 6 crore 80 lakh. Last year we booked more than 1000 drug cases of which 88 were peddling cases," he added. The accused was identified as Laltanpuia, 35, a resident of Tlangsam village, Champhai district. —*ANI*

Can't get it in shop: DKS to Jarkiholi over KPCC remarks

Jarkiholi has said that a full-time leader is required in KPCC

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Thursday hit out at Minister Satish Jarkiholi for his statement on replacing him as the party's State president.

Shivakumar has been serving as Congress state chief since 2020.

"Can anyone get it (post) in the media? You can't get it in the media or any shop. It is given as a reward for the work we do. Will the media gift it to you. These are new trends," Shivakumar told reporters here.

Jarkiholi on Wednesday sparked a debate within the ruling Congress over the change of the state president, saying a full-time leader was needed to devote more time to the party in the state.

According to him, while there is a lot of discussion happening at the lower levels, it should come from the top.

Later, he clarified that he never spoke about replacing Shivakumar as the Congress president.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has been serving as Congress State Chief since 2020 **PHOTO: X**

Taking a U-turn from his statement apparently after a rap from the party high command, the minister on late Wednesday blamed the media for twisting his statement.

"The reports that appeared in the media are far from truth. Some media reports were made to look grandiose," Jarkiholi, who holds public works portfolio, said in a video statement on his Facebook page.

"I never spoke about replacing DK Shivakumar. I only gave some suggestions keeping in view the party organisation and upcoming elections," he added.

He said such statement should have come from the top, but it came from the ground level, to which he belongs.

Meanwhile, the Congress state working president Manjunath Bhandary on Thursday asked seniors to refrain from making such statements.

The seniors who violate the high command's orders are not disciplined soldiers of the Congress, Bhandary said in a statement.

According to him, the leadership of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, senior leaders Sonia Gandhi, and Rahul Gandhi are strong in the party.

"The party high command leaders will decide all matters such as when to change the KPCC president and the chief minister, who should continue or who should be the ministers. However, no minister should give a statement in this regard," Bhandary said. —*PTI*

Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil said that 13 BBMP hospitals would be upgraded to 30-bed and five as 50-bed hospitals **PHOTO: X**

Cabinet approves ₹413 crore for BBMP hospitals

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

Cabinet on Thursday approved a Rs 413.71 crore project to upgrade the hospitals operated by the Bengaluru civic agency under the 'Brand Bengaluru' scheme.

Under this scheme, the dilapidated buildings would be replaced with new ones.

"Under the Brand Bengaluru scheme, all the hospitals run by the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) would be upgraded at a cost of Rs 413.71 crore," Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil briefed reporters after the cabinet meeting.

"All the government hospitals run by the BBMP would be upgraded," the minister added.

According to him, 13 BBMP hospitals would be upgraded to 30-bed and five as 50-bed hospitals. As many as 22 dental hospitals and seven physiotherapy hospitals will also be established. —*PTI*

Woman dies of self-immolation, 1 held

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

A 25-year-old IT employee died of self-immolation at Kundalahalli in the City after her uncle allegedly blackmailed her with private photos and videos, police said on Thursday.

The deceased Suhasi Singh, immolated herself using petrol on Sunday night at a hotel room in Kundalahalli.

According to the police, the incident took place on 12 January evening.

The woman set herself afire by pouring inflammable material on her body.

Following the incident, a probe was launched and the HAL police arrested the accused, Praveen Singh ,42, charging him with blackmail and abetment to suicide.

According to the police Singh, who is married, was in in relationship with her.

"As per initial investigations, Praveen began blackmailing Suhasi with private videos when she started distancing herself from him," Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Whitefield, Shivakumar said on Thursday.

"The accused allegedly threatened to share the videos with her parents and demanded sexual favours from her. On 12 January, booked a room at Radha Hometel near Kundalahalli metro station and called Suhasi to visit him . Following an argument, Suhasi set herself on fire inside the hotel room," the official added.

The police recovered a pen drive from Praveen's possession, which has been sent for forensic analysis. Further investigations are underway to gather additional details and establish a comprehensive timeline of events.

(Suicide is not the solution. Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.)

—*Salar News*

Minister Patil says it is caste survey not census

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

Amid chaos over the State government not tabling the caste survey report, Minister MB Patil on Thursday said that they have noted that certain sub-castes in the Lingayat community have registered as Hindus owing to the reservation policy. He further clarified that this was a "caste survey" undertaken by the state government and it was the prerogative of the central government to undertake caste census.

"Nothing has gone wrong. We don't know what is inside the caste census (report). First of all, this is not a caste census. It can only be done by the Government of India. This is merely a caste survey. As far as the Lingayat community is concerned, we have noted that there are many sub-castes in the community. Because of reservation the sub-castes have registered as Hindus, but they are part of the Lingayat community," Patil told reporters. He said that there was a need to bring the Lingayat subcastes under one roof or else it would be "unjust". —*ANI*

Subsidies must directly reach farmers: VP

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Thursday said any subsidy given to the farm sector, in any form, must reach the farmer directly.

The VP was delivering his address as chief guest at the inaugural event of Amrut Mahotsav and Alumni Meet of College of Agriculture, University of Agricultural Sciences, in Dharwad on Thursday.

The VP also said farmers' distress requires urgent national attention. He said agro-based industries are prospering. —*PTI*

Pratap Simha **PHOTO: PTI**

CM. Siddaramaiah **PHOTO: PTI**

CM is anti-Lingayat, says ex-MP Simha

MYSURU, 16 JAN

Former MP Pratap Simha on Thursday alleged that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is anti-Lingayat. He further demanded an end to the appeasement of Muslims for political advantage in the state.

He accused the Chief Minister of targeting Lingayat and Vokkaliga community officials by denying them promotions and insulting them. He also called on the IAS Officers Association to lodge a strong protest against such incidents.

Simha criticised Home Minister G Parameshwara, claiming he had become powerless to prevent incidents like the severing of udders from cows.

He intensified his attacks by highlighting incidents that hurt Hindu sentiments, such as disrespecting cows and cutting off the tails of a bull in Nanjangud on Thursday. Local residents held a protest, alleging that despite the temple receiving several bulls as offering from devotees, its authorities failed to build a goshala to safeguard them Simha stated that attacks on officials and killings of Hindu activists, which were reported during Siddaramaiah's previous Congress government, are now rampant under the current government.

Earlier, BJP activists, led by Pratap Simha, held a protest in Mysuru on Thursday, performing "gow puja" to condemn the state government following the incident of severing the udders of a cow in Bengaluru. —*Salar News*

Sudheendra, MoS discuss bioenergy projects in State

BENGALURU 16 JAN

State Bioenergy Development Board Chairman SE Sudheendra on Thursday met Union Minister of State for Education, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Jayant Chaudhary, to discuss advancing bioenergy projects in State. The meeting focused on scaling up bioenergy initiatives, including biodiesel, compressed biogas, and green hydrogen production, as well as creating a skilled workforce to support these developments.

Sudheendra highlighted the State's efforts in biofuel production and its potential to attract investors for manufacturing units, operations, and maintenance activities. He also emphasized the critical role of human resource development and skills training in fostering growth within the bioenergy sector. The state has established a National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL) accredited Bioenergy Research and Quality Assurance Laboratory at Bengaluru Agriculture University to enhance research capabilities.

—*Salar News*

BJP accuses CM of disrespecting IAS officers

MYSURU, 16 JAN

AH Vishwanath, former minister and BJP MLC, has publicly condemned Chief Minister Siddaramaiah for allegedly disrespecting the Vijayanagar Deputy Commissioner during an inter-religious mass marriage function in Bandalli village. Vishwanath stated that the CM's decision to address the IAS officer in the singular was an affront to the district's administrative integrity and called for an end to what he termed Siddaramaiah's 'arrogant attitude'.

He also urged the government to release findings from the caste census rather than using it politically to mask its failures. He asserted that the Chief Minister has yet to deliver significant developmental initiatives. —*Salar News*

CRIME BEAT

Missing dog breeder 'murdered', manhunt on

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

A tragic incident has unfolded in North Bengaluru, where the body of a 32-year-old dog breeder, Guna, was discovered following his disappearance. Guna's wife, Josephine, reported him missing on 10 January after he left home to collect payment at an apartment in Hegde Nagar, accompanied by a friend.

Guna was last seen entering the building, and later surveillance footage revealed a man named Brijesh and another unidentified individual dragging Guna's body wrapped in a blood-stained bedsheet into an elevator. Josephine initially received a call from a stranger claiming her husband had been taken into custody by Chikkaballapur police, who denied this.

Authorities have registered a First Information Report (FIR) for murder, evidence tampering, and criminal conspiracy, and are actively seeking Brijesh and his accomplice as the investigation continues. The couple had been married for 12 years and had two children aged 10 and 6.

—*Salar News*

Man kills wife in HD Kote, surrenders

MYSURU, 16 JAN

A man stabbed his wife to death in a fit of rage at Kaniyanahundi village and surrendered before HD Kote Police on Wednesday night.

Police identified the accused as Devaraju of the village. His wife is Tejaswini, 26, hailed from Katewadi village of Mysuru taluk.

The couple got married eight years ago and has a -son and daughter. Devaraju told the police that he killed his wife in a fit of anger. —*Salar News*

BESCOM to host Vidyut Adalat on Saturday

In a bid to enhance consumer service and ensure prompt resolution of electricity-related concerns, the Bangalore Electricity Supply Company (BESCOM) will conduct Vidyut Adalat, a customer interaction session, at all its sub-division offices on Saturday. Scheduled for the third Saturday of each month from 3pm to 5.30pm, the meeting allows consumers to address their grievances directly with the officials in attendance. BESCOM urges consumers to take part in the session to facilitate the resolution of issues related to electricity supply. —*Salar News*

11 DAY EVENT

Traffic advisory issued for Lalbagh flower show

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

The Bengaluru Traffic Police have issued an advisory to ensure the smooth flow of traffic during the Republic Day Flower Show, organised by the Department of Horticulture. The show began on Thursday and will run for 11 days.

The flower show is being held at Lalbagh Botanical Garden, and around 8 to 10 lakh visitors are expected to attend, according to the police.

This 217th edition of the flower show is themed around Maharshi Valmiki.

As per the advisory, vehicle parking will be prohibited within the limits of Wilson Garden traffic police station and the surrounding roads.

Additionally, parking will not be allowed from Lalbagh main gate to NIMHANS on both sides of Dr Marigowda Road, from KH Circle to Shanthinagar Junction on both sides of Double Road, and from Subbaiah Circle to Lalbagh main gate on both sides of Lalbagh Road.

217th Flower Show at Lalbagh Botanical Garden in Bengaluru, part of Republic Day celebrations, on Thursday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Restrictions also extend from Urvashi Theater Junction to Wilson Garden 12th Cross on both sides of Siddaiah Road, from BMTC Junction towards the post office on BTS Road, on both sides of Krumbigal Road, and from Lalbagh West Gate to RV Teachers College, Ashoka Pillar, and Siddapura Junction. However, parking will be allowed at Al-Ameen College premises (for two-wheelers) on Dr Marigowda Road, the Shantinagar BMTC multi-storey parking lot, the Hopcoms parking lot, and the Corporation parking lot.

Vehicles coming from Dairy Circle towards Lalbagh can take a right turn at the 10th Cross Junction and proceed towards City Market, Majestic, Wilson Garden Main Road, and BMTC (KH) Road via BTS Road. —*PTI*

Hampi's Virupaksha temple bans bananas

HAMPI, 16 JAN

A seventh-century shrine of Lord Shiva in Hampi has banned bananas on its premises, stating that devotees tend to overfeed the temple elephant, besides littering the place of worship with banana peels.

Hanaumantappa, the endowment officer of the Virupaksha temple said on Thursday, "We saw that the devotees get overzealous in their attempts to feed the elephant, which is not only harmful to the animal, but it also makes the place very dirty. The devotees leave behind banana peels and even the plastic bags that they bring the bananas in."

The officer appealed to people to take the banana ban in good spirit. "This is a local matter. We made the decision based purely on what was happening inside our temple premises," said Hanaumantappa.

Virupaksha temple is often referred to as Dakshin Kashi and is visited by around 5,000 devotees every day. On special days and weekends, the daily crowd swells to even 50,000, said sources in the temple. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Delhi riots accused Tahir released to file nominations

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Delhi riots accused Tahir Hussain left Tihar jail on Thursday morning to file nomination papers for the Delhi polls after the high court granted him custody parole, jail sources said. "He was released from the jail under heavy security cover of the Delhi Police. He left the jail at around 9.15 am," said the source. Hussain, a former Aam Aadmi Party former AAP councillor, has been fielded by the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) from the Mustafabad constituency for 5 February 5 Assembly polls. Delhi High Court on Tuesday granted custody parole to Hussain in a riots-related murder case to enable him to file nomination papers —*PTI*

6 suspected Arambai Tenggol members arrested

IMPHAL, 16 JAN

Six suspected members of radical Meitei group Arambai Tenggol were arrested in connection with the death of a person in Manipur's Thoubal district, police said on Thursday. One Md Nawash was kidnapped from his house on Tuesday for ransom by suspected members of the group, they said. He was later taken to the Thoubal district hospital where doctors declared him brought dead, they added. Meanwhile, illegal poppy cultivation on 4.8 acre area was destroyed in Manipur's Churachandpur district, police said on Thursday. A joint team of the police, Assam Rifles, Forest Department and executive magistrate conducted the operation on Haopi Mollen Hill in Sangaikot police station area on Wednesday, they said. —*PTI*

Cong leader dies after being hit by bus in Kerala

ALAPPUZHA, 16 JAN

A local Congress leader died near Poochakkal here on Thursday after being hit by a private bus while he was out for a morning walk, police said. Seventy-year-old MR Ravi, an executive committee member of the Alappuzha District Congress Committee (DCC), was hit by the speeding bus while he was standing near a bus stop, an officer of Poochakkal police station said. Ravi died on the way to the hospital, the officer said. The incident occurred around 7 am, he said. A case of rash and negligent driving has been registered, police said —*PTI*

Panel formed for judicial probe in Beed murder case

MUMBAI, 16 JAN

Maharashtra government has set up a single-member committee of retired high court judge M L Tahaliyani for a judicial inquiry into the murder of sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh in Beed district, officials said on Thursday. Deshmukh, the sarpanch of Massajog village in Beed, was abducted, allegedly tortured, and murdered on 9 December. Preliminary investigations indicated that Deshmukh had tried to resist an extortion attempt on an energy company operating a windmill project in the area. The committee is also tasked with suggesting measures to prevent similar occurrences in the future, the order said. Meanwhile, maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange on Thursday alleged that the "gang" of Dhananjay Munde has devastated the family of Beed sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh who was murdered last month—*PTI*

8th Pay Commission gets PM's approval

Hike effective from 1 Jan will benefit 1.5 cr

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday approved setting up the 8th Pay Commission to revise salaries of nearly 50 lakh central government employees and allowances of 65 lakh pensioners.

The chairman and two members of the Commission will be appointed soon, I&B Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told reporters here.

"Prime Minister has approved 8th Central Pay Commission for central government employees," the minister said.

The term of the 7th Pay Commission will end in 2026.

Since 1947, seven Pay Commissions have been constituted, with the last one implemented in 2016.

As the 7th Pay Commission's term concludes in 2026, initiating the process in 2025 ensures sufficient time to receive and review recommendations before its completion, the minister added.

He said the setting up of the new Pay Commission in 2025 will ensure that its recommendations are received well before the completion of the term of the seventh pay panel.

The 7th Pay Commission was constituted in 2014 and its recommendations were implemented on 1 January, 2016.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi PHOTO: PTI

Sources said around 50 lakh central government employees, including defence personnel, will benefit from the decision.

Also, about 65 lakh pensioners, including defence people, will also see an uptick in their pensions, they added.

The 7th pay commission saw an expenditure increase of Rs 1 lakh crore for fiscal 2016-17.

Usually, every 10 years, the central government constitutes a pay commission to revise the remuneration of its employees.

The pay commission also recommends the formula for the revision of dearness allowance and dearness relief for central government employees and pensioners with a view to compensating them for inflation.

Several state governments also revise the remuneration of their employees on the lines of the central pay commission. —*PTI*

- As the 7th Pay Commission's term concludes in 2026, initiating the process in 2025 ensures sufficient time to receive and review recommendations before its completion

Startup India 'close to my heart', says PM

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Lauding Startup India as a transformative programme, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on its ninth anniversary on Thursday that the initiative has propelled India to become one of the largest and most vibrant startup ecosystems globally.

It is a landmark initiative that has redefined innovation, entrepreneurship and growth, Modi said, describing the programme as "very close to my heart", as it has emerged as a powerful way of furthering youth empowerment.

The PM posted on X, "Over the past nine years, this transformative program has empowered countless youngsters, turning their innovative ideas into successful Startups."

People would doubt India's ability to thrive in this system just a decade ago, he added.

From tech-driven solutions to rural innovations, healthcare advancements to biotech breakthroughs, Fintech to EdTech, clean energy to sustainable technology, Indian startups are solving global challenges while creating employment opportunities and boosting the country's quest towards self-reliance, he said.

Underlining his government's commitment to fostering an entrepreneurial ecosystem that uplifts every dream and contributes to Aatmanirbhar Bharat, Modi said his dispensation immensely encouraged a culture of startups.

The PM said his government's policies have focused on "Ease of Doing Business", greater access to resources and, most importantly, supporting the startups at every juncture.

Modi said, "We are actively promoting innovation and incubation centres so that youngsters become risk-takers. I have been regularly interacting with upcoming startups." —*PTI*

Bihar: PK ends fast unto death in BPSC exam row

PATNA, 16 JAN

Jan Suraaj Party founder Prashant Kishor on Thursday withdrew his fast unto death after 14 days of protest over alleged irregularities in a competitive exam conducted by the Bihar Public Service Commission on 13 December last year.

However, the former political strategist said his 'Satyagraha' would continue for the cause of civil service aspirants, and the youth of the state and also against the alleged 'authoritarian' attitude of the state government.

"The matter, seeking the cancellation of the BPSC's 70th Combined Competitive exam held on December 13, is being heard by the Patna High Court today. It's a coincidence that I am calling off my fast unto death on a day when the matter is being heard before the court. We are quite hopeful that job aspirants will get justice from the Patna High Court," Kishor said. —*PTI*

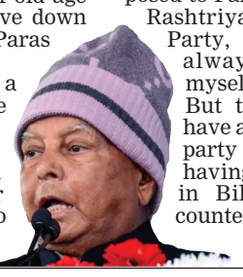
Bihar: RJD's Lalu hints at tie-up with Paras

PATNA, 16 JAN

RJD president Lalu Prasad has dropped hints that the Mahagathbandhan helmed by his party might bring on board former Union minister Pashupati Kumar Paras, whom the NDA has sidelined in favour of estranged nephew Chirag Paswan.

Prasad, who has of late been spending most of his time indoors on account of old age and poor health, drove down to the residence of Paras on Wednesday.

He was invitated for a feast on the occasion of Makar Sankranti.



Journalists mobbed the former Bihar chief minister, who was accompanied by elder son Tej Pratap Yadav and RJD national general secretary Abdul Bari Siddiqui.

Prasad did not speak much, but uttered a curt "haan" (yes) in reply to repeated questions as to whether Paras would be welcomed in the coalition that currently includes RJD, Congress and the Left.

Later, when questions were posed to Paras, who heads the Rashtriya Lok Janshakti Party, he said, "I have always considered myself an NDA partner. But the BJP seems to have abandoned me. The party always speaks of having five constituents in Bihar. I am never counted." —*PTI*

India welcomes ceasefire & hostage release deal

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

India on Wednesday welcomed the announcement on a Gaza ceasefire and hostage release deal between Israel and Hamas.

Israel and Hamas have agreed a deal which would halt the war in Gaza and see the release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners, the US and mediators Qatar have said.

The deal between Israel and Hamas came after months and it is expected to come into effect on Sunday if both sides fully approve it.

In its reaction, India hoped that the agreement would lead to a safe and sustained supply of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza.

"We welcome the announcement of the agreement for the release of hostages and a ceasefire in Gaza," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

"We hope this will lead to a safe and sustained supply of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza," it said in a statement.

GAZA WAR

PHOTO: X

The MEA added: "We have consistently called for release of all hostages, ceasefire, and return to a path of dialogue and diplomacy."

The full details of the deal are not yet announced.

The deal is expected to stop the ongoing war in Gaza and facilitate release of Israeli hostages held by Hamas.

In a readout on Wednesday, the White House said President Joe Biden spoke with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to congratulate him on the ceasefire and hostage release deal. —*PTI*

ON 21 JAN

101 farmers to resume Delhi march

CHANDIGARH, 16 JAN

A group of 101 farmers will resume on 21 January their march to Delhi from the Shambhu border point to press the government to accept their demands, including a legal guarantee for minimum support price for crops, farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said on Thursday.

The group of 101 farmers earlier made three attempts to head towards Delhi on foot on 6, 8 and 14 December from the Shambhu border. However, security personnel in Haryana did not allow them to proceed.

The fresh move of protesting farmers came a day after a group of 111 farmers began a fast-unto-death on the Haryana side of the border near Khanauri in solidarity with fasting farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, whose fast-unto-death entered its 52nd day on Thursday.

The fresh move of protesting farmers came a day after a group of 111 farmers began a fast-unto-death on the Haryana border PHOTO: PTI

Speaking to reporters at the Shambhu border point between Punjab and Haryana on Thursday, Pandher, who is the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha leader, slammed the central government for not accepting the demands of farmers who have been camping at the Shambhu and Khanauri for the last 11 months.

"Both the forums (SKM-Non Political, KMM) today decided that the 'jatha' of 101 farmers will resume their march to Delhi on January 21 from the Shambhu border," said Pandher.

"We have seen and we also feel that the government is not ready for talks. It was the decision of both the forums to intensify the agitation," said Pandher.

The Haryana Police has enhanced security on its side of the border. It has already imposed Section 163 of Bhartiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, banning gatherings of five or more people. —*PTI*

DELHI POLLS 2025

The announcement was made by Telangana CM A Revanth Reddy, in New Delhi, on Thursday PHOTO: PTI

Congress promises ₹500 LPG, free ration

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Congress on Thursday said it would give Rs 500 LPG cylinder, free ration kits, and free electricity up to 300 units to the city residents if voted to power in Delhi.

The announcement was made by Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy who was addressing a press conference here with AICC Delhi in-charge Qazi Nizamuddin and Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav.

"Congress will fulfil its five guarantees if it will be elected to power in Delhi," Reddy said.

He also said his government in Telangana waived farmer loans to the tune of Rs 21,000 crore in one year.

Meanwhile, Congress on Thursday announced its final list of candidates with two names for the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections.

The party has now declared all 70 candidates.

According to the latest list, Lokendra Chaudhary has been fielded from Timarpur, while Suresh Wati Chauhan will contest from Rohtas Nagar. The Delhi Assembly elections are scheduled for 5 February. —*PTI*

Delhi Polls: BJP releases fourth list

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

BJP on Thursday, released their fourth list of candidates for the upcoming Delhi Assembly Elections. With this list, the party has confirmed a total of 68 candidates for the election.

BJP's Shikha Rai will be contesting against state minister of health and AAP leader Saurabh Bharadwaj and Congress' Garvit Singhvi for Greater Kailash constituency.

Babarpur constituency is another notable seat, where Minister and incumbent MLA, Gopal Rai, will be contesting against BJP's Anil Vashishth and Congress' Haji Mohd Ishraq Khan.

The party has also fielded Ravinder Kumar from the Bawana (SC) constituency; Poonam Sharma from Wazipur; Bhuvan Tanwar from Delhi Cantt; Chandan Kumar Choudhary from Sangam Vihar; Ravikant Ujjain from Trilokpuri (SC); Sanjay Goyal from Shahdara; Praveen from Gokalpur (SC). —*ANI*

Defamation plaint: Court issues notices to Atishi, Sanjay

A Delhi court on Thursday issued notice to Chief Minister Atishi and AAP MP Sanjay Singh on a criminal defamation complaint filed by former Congress MP Sandeep Dikshit. Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Paras Dalal directed the AAP leaders to file a reply by 27 January, when the court will further hear the matter. The defamation complaint alleged that Atishi and Singh "deliberately caused harm to the goodwill of Dikshit".

LABEL CAMPAIGN MATERIAL GENERATED USING AI: EC TO PARTIES

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Amid increasing use of artificial intelligence in campaigning and its potential to influence voter opinion, the Election Commission on Thursday issued an advisory to political parties asking them to promote transparency and accountability in the use of AI-generated content.

The advisory introduces labelling and disclosure norms requiring parties to clearly label any images, videos, audio or other materials generated or significantly altered by AI technologies with a notation such as "AI-Generated"/ "Digitally Enhanced" /"Synthetic Content".

It also requires political parties to include disclaimers during dissemination of campaign advertisements or promotional content, wherever synthetic content is utilised.

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar had recently cautioned against the potential of AI and deep fakes in compounding the malaise of misinformation.

He had expressed concern that deep fakes and misinformation have the potential to erode trust in electoral processes.

During last year's Lok Sabha elections, the Commission had issued guidelines for responsible and ethical use of social media platforms.

The BJP and AAP digital campaigns ahead of Delhi polls have been using AI-generated content to target each other. —*PTI*

Formula-E case: KTR appears before ED

HYDERABAD, 16 JAN

BRS working president KT Rama Rao on Thursday appeared before the Enforcement Directorate here for questioning in a money laundering case related to the Formula-E race event.

Rao, who was the Municipal Administration Minister in the previous BRS regime, said hosting Formula E race in Hyderabad remains one of his most cherished decisions as a minister.

Ahead of his appearance before the ED, Rao in a post on 'X' said : "no amount of frivolous, cheap mud-slinging, or political witch-hunting can erase that sense of accomplishment."

Rao, popularly known as KTR, was earlier issued summons to appear before the ED on 7 January. However, he had requested two weeks and was subsequently given a new date to appear on 16 January.

Accordingly, he appeared before the ED.

Rao arrived at the ED office at 10.30 am.

The probe is linked to alleged irregularities in payments for proposed Formula-E race held in Hyderabad. —*PTI*

ALH-Dhruv, Tejas will not be joining R-Day flypast

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

PHOTO: X

The indigenously designed and developed Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) Dhruv will not be part of the upcoming Republic Day flypast as the entire fleet of the military choppers has been grounded following a crash of one of them this month, an IAF official has said.

The Army, the Indian Air Force, the Navy and the Coast Guard are operating around 330 ALHs.

A Coast Guard ALH crashed at Gujarat's Porbandar on 5 January, following which the armed forces grounded the entire fleet of the twin-engine choppers.

The choppers are likely to remain grounded till a high-level probe panel finds the root cause of the crash that killed two Coast Guard pilots and an aircrew diver. The helicopters have been part of the Republic Day flypasts for nearly one-and-half decades.

The ALH-Dhruv, produced by state-run aerospace major Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) is a multi-role, multi-mission new generation helicopter in the 5.5 ton weight class. —*PTI*

POCSO case against 3 scribes from Kerala

T'PURAM, 16 JAN

A case under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act has been registered against a senior editor and two reporters of a leading Malayalam news channel in connection with their reporting during the recent state school festival, police said on Thursday. The offences are bailable, the police said. The case was registered based on a report by the Women and Child Development Office, the officer said. The police said that according to the report, during the coverage of the state school festival held in the first week of January, certain statements by the channel's reporters about one of the contestants appeared to have "double meaning". —*PTI*

SC collegium clears 4 names for T'gana HC judges

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Supreme Court collegium headed by Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna has approved the proposal for appointment of four judicial officers as judges of the Telangana High Court. The collegium, in a meeting held on 11 January, approved the names of Renuka Yara, Narsing Rao Nandikonda, Tirumala Devi Eada and Madhusudhan Rao Bobbili Ramaiah. In another decision, the collegium also approved the appointment of judicial officers—Avadhanam Hari Haranadha Sarma and Dr Yadavalli Lakshmana Rao— as judges of the Andhra Pradesh High Court. —*PTI*

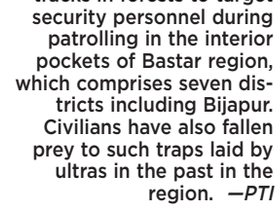


PHOTO: PTI

2 jawans hurt as bomb planted by Naxals explodes

BIJAPUR, 16 JAN

Two commandos of CRPF's CoBRA unit were injured when a pressure improvised explosive device (IED) planted by Naxalites went off in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur on Thursday, police said. The incident occurred in Basaguda police station area when a joint team of security forces was out on an area domination operation. The injured constables, Mridul Barman and Mohd Ishaq, of the CoBRA 206th battalion, were evacuated and shifted to Basaguda CRPF camp where they were provided preliminary treatment, the official said, adding the duo was reported to be out of danger. Maoists often plant IEDs along the road and dirt tracks in forests to target security personnel during patrolling in the interior pockets of Bastar region, which comprises seven districts including Bijapur. Civilians have also fallen prey to such traps laid by ultras in the past in the region. —*PTI*

ED raids in Howrah over Rs 6,000 cr bank fraud

KOLKATA, 16 JAN

Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday conducted simultaneous raids at three different places in Kolkata and Howrah in connection with a Rs 6,000-crore bank fraud case, an officer said. The searches were conducted at the residence and offices of a businessman, he said. "While investigating the matter we came across several shell companies and agencies which were allegedly involved in the crime. This person is the director of one such agency," the officer said. In December, the ED arrested Concast Steel and Power's promoter Sanjay Sureka in the case. The agency had seized jewellery worth Rs 4.5 crore and several foreign luxury cars from his possession. The case was registered in 2022 after the arrested industrialist had allegedly duped a nationalised bank in Jharkhand. —*PTI*

Wrong to brand Mumbai as unsafe over Saif attack: CM

Oppn leaders say even celebrities are not safe in Mumbai

MUMBAI, 16 JAN

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday said the attack on Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan by an intruder at his home was a serious incident, but it would be wrong to call Mumbai unsafe because of it.

This was as Opposition leaders said even celebrities were not safe in India's financial capital, and Fadnavis, who holds the home portfolio, has failed to maintain law and order.

Talking to reporters, Chief Minister Fadnavis asserted that Mumbai is a safe city. "I think Mumbai is the safest among mega cities in the country. It is true that some incidents take place sometimes, and they must be taken seriously," he said.

"But, to make the city safer, the government will certainly make efforts," he added.

NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar said the incident shows that the law and order situation was deteriorating in Maharashtra.

"Recently, a person was killed in the same area and now this incident. All these things are worrisome," Pawar told reporters at Baramati. "The state government, especially the chief minister who holds charge of the home department, should pay attention to these things more seriously," the former Maharashtra chief minister said.

Saif Ali Khan's wife and actor Kareena Kapoor Khan was present in the house when the incident took place PHOTO: PTI

In October last year, former state minister Baba Siddique was shot dead by three persons in Bandra area.

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut said, "No one is safe. Let alone ordinary people, even celebrities who have their own security are not safe."

Fadnavis had completely failed to maintain law and order, said Congress spokesperson Atul Londhe.

Prominent politicians including West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Arvind Kejriwal and Chiranjeevi, expressed shock over the attack on Saif Ali Khan.

"It's very concerning to hear about the attack on noted actor Saif Ali Khan. I pray for his speedy recovery, trusting that the law will take its course and those responsible will be held accountable. My thoughts and prayers are with Sharmila Di, Kareena Kapoor, and the entire family during this difficult time," Banerjee posted on X.

> **Can this lawlessness please be curbed @MumbaiPolice @CPMumbaiPolice We need more Police presence in Bandra. The city & especially the queen of the subburbs, have never felt so unsafe before**
>
> -Pooja Bhatt, Actor

> **Deeply disturbed by news of the attack by an intruder on #SaifAliKhan. Wishing and praying for his speedy recovery**
>
> -Chiranjeevi, Actor

Kejriwal said, "Shocked to hear about the attack on Saif Ali Khan. Wishing him a speedy recovery and strength to his family during this difficult time."

The son of actor Sharmila Tagore and late cricketer Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi, Saif Ali Khan is known for his performances in films like 'Omkara', 'Dil Chahta Hai', 'Kal Ho Naa Ho' and 'Tanhaj: The Unsung Warrior'. He is also a recipient of the Padma Shri award. —*PTI*

NO INFECTIONS DETECTED

SIT to probe J&K mysterious deaths as toll touches 15

JAMMU, 16 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

A nine-year-old girl has died in a Jammu hospital, raising the total number of unexplained deaths in Badhaal village, Rajouri district, to 15 within the past six weeks. Local authorities have established a special investigation team (SIT) to determine the cause of these fatalities.

Jammu and Kashmir Health Minister Sakeena Masood has dismissed the possibility of a mysterious disease, stating that extensive testing both regionally and nationally has yielded negative results. The latest victim, Zabeena, succumbed to her condition at SMGS hospital, following the deaths of her four siblings and grandfather in recent days. All cases have presented similar symptoms, including vomiting and loss of consciousness.

The BJP's Jammu and Kashmir unit has sharply criticised the National Conference-led government for its inaction and called for urgent intervention from central authorities to investigate the situation thoroughly. Spokesperson Tahir Choudhary stated the government's neglect posed an unacceptable risk to public health.

In response to concerns, officials have started analysing reports from various institutions to identify potential causes, with initial findings suggesting the presence of neurotoxins in the deceased's samples. The 11-member SIT, led by Superintendent of Police Wajahat Hussain, includes experts from multiple departments, including Forensic Medicine and Toxicology.

Health Minister Masood reported that the health department has screened 3,500 villagers and tested numerous samples from the area, with no infectious agents detected. The situation remains under close scrutiny as officials strive to uncover the source of these tragic deaths. —*PTI*

M'rashtra to launch 'innovation city' inspired by Gujarat's GIFT

MUMBAI, 16 JAN

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has announced ambitious plans to establish an "Innovation City" in Maharashtra, modelling it on Gujarat's GIFT City, to enhance the state's competitive edge in India's burgeoning start-up ecosystem.

Addressing a forum on start-ups and technology, Fadnavis outlined the initiative, which aims to cultivate a hub of technology and innovation, especially in emerging fields like artificial intelligence (AI). "We aspire to develop an Innovation City in Maharashtra at an even faster pace than GIFT City," he remarked.

GIFT City is India's first International Financial Services Centre and serves as a magnet for domestic and international businesses.

- GIFT City is India's first International Financial Services Centre and serves as a magnet for domestic and international businesses.

Fadnavis highlighted Maharashtra's status as home to over 25,000 start-ups, leading in both investment and valuation, while also celebrating the state's ranking as the top start-up ecosystem in India, driven by cities like Mumbai, Pune, and Nagpur.

With India now housing the world's third-largest start-up ecosystem—with over 157,000 start-ups—Fadnavis is optimistic about the country's potential to lead globally in this sector.

He also announced a new partnership with the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) to create a Rs 100-crore fund, ensuring financial support reaches tier-2 and tier-3 cities. Additionally, Fadnavis discussed transforming Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) into AI-focused centres and urged stakeholders to collaborate in building a robust AI ecosystem.

The chief minister aims to eliminate bureaucratic hurdles to ease the process of setting up businesses in Maharashtra. —*PTI*

NEW DAY, ANOTHER ROW

Model takes part in Kumbh, seer fumes

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 16 JAN

A controversy has erupted over anchor and influencer Harsha Richhariya sitting on a chariot along with seers during Chhavani Pravesh procession by Niranjani Akhara members, a ritual marking their formal entry in the Maha Kumbh.

Swami Anand Swaroop, Kali Sena Chief, objected to her conduct, saying Kumbh is organised for spreading knowledge and spirituality and should not be used as a publicity event by models.

Images of Richhariya in saffron robes during the Kumbh had circulated in various media but she had later reportedly clarified that she was not as 'sanyasin' (ascetic). President of the Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad (ABAP) Mahant Ravindra Puri, however, downplayed the issue, saying wearing saffron clothes is not a crime and the young woman had taken 'mantra deeksha' from a Mahamandaleshwar of Niranjani Akhara. Swami Anand Swaroop said, "The Kumbh is meant for the flow of 'jap' (chanting), 'tap' (penance) and 'gyaan' (knowledge). Therefore, please take action against this inappropriate act." Puri referred to Richhariya as Harshita and said she had come to take 'deeksha' from one of the Mahamandaleshwar of Niranjani Akhara. "She is a model, and remains highlighted in social media," he said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Google honours Kumbh with petal animation

Google is celebrating the ongoing Maha Kumbh with a rose petal animation on its search screen. If one looks up 'Kumbh', 'Maha Kumbh', 'Kumbh Mela', 'Mahakumbh' or any similar iterations on Google, the screen plays an animation in the background showing a virtual shower of rose petals. Google also allows for the animation to be replayed. —*PTI*

SC flays ED for not giving bail to women in PMLA cases

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

The Supreme Court has delivered a strong rebuke to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) regarding its stance on bail conditions for women accused of money laundering, despite a clear statutory exemption under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002. A bench composed of Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih was hearing the bail plea of Shashi Bala, a government school teacher implicated in a money laundering scam linked to the Shine City Group of Companies.

The court labelled the ED's arguments as "contrary to statute", emphasising that such positions would be met with intolerance. Bala has been in custody since November 2023, and the bench expressed concern over the likelihood of her trial concluding in the near future.

PHOTO: X

The ED had contended that the strict bail conditions outlined in the PMLA should apply to women as well. However, Section 45(1) contains a significant exception, stating that individuals under the age of sixteen, women, and those who are sick or infirm may be granted bail if directed by a Special Court. The Shine City Group has been accused of defrauding the public of between Rs 800-1,000 crore through deceptive investment schemes. —*PTI*

Justice Viswanathan recuses himself from coal scam case

Justice KV Viswanathan of the Supreme Court recused himself from hearing coal scam cases, citing his prior involvement as a lawyer in one matter. The bench, led by Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna, was reviewing appeals seeking modifications to earlier Supreme Court orders that barred high courts from addressing appeals against trial court rulings in connection with alleged illegal coal block allocations. A fresh three-judge bench will be constituted to hear the cases in the week starting 10 February. The Supreme Court had previously annulled 214 coal block allocations made by the Centre between 1993 and 2010, mandating that stay applications could only be filed in the Supreme Court. —*PTI*

SC to hear Godhra train burning case on 13 February

The Supreme Court of India has scheduled a hearing for 13 February regarding appeals from the Gujarat government and several convicts in the 2002 Godhra train burning case. On 27 February, 2002, 59 people lost their lives when a coach of the Sabarmati Express was set on fire in Godhra, sparking widespread riots. The appeals challenge the Gujarat High Court's October 2017 ruling, which upheld multiple convictions and commuted the death sentences of 11 individuals to life imprisonment. The Gujarat government plans to seek reinstatement of death penalties. The bench, led by Justices JK Maheshwari and Aravind Kumar, emphasised that no further adjournments will be granted. —*PTI*

Underground water hampers Assam mine ops

GUWAHATI, 16 JAN

Rescue efforts to save five miners trapped in a flooded coal quarry in Assam's Dima Hasao district are being hampered by suspected seepage of fresh water from underground streams, officials reported on Thursday. Despite the continuous operation of several pumps to dewater the mine, the water level is receding slowly, delaying progress.

The coal mine in Umrangso area flooded on 6 January, trapping nine workers. Since then, four bodies have been recovered. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma reported that 18 machines are being used in the dewatering process, which is gradually reducing the water level, initially at 100 feet. —*PTI*

16 Sambhal mosques accused of 1,400 power theft cases

SAMBHAL, 16 JAN

Since the violence during a court-ordered survey at the Shahi Jama Masjid here on 24 November, 2024, the district has seen an intensified crackdown on electricity theft, resulting in the registration of more than 1,400 cases, implicating 16 mosques and 2 madrasas.

"A fine of Rs 11 crore has been imposed in these cases, and nearly Rs 20 lakh has been recovered as of now," Superintending Engineer Vinod Kumar said.

He highlighted the broader impact of the crackdown, saying, "Following the initiation of this campaign, applications for new electricity connections have been received from 22 mosques and one church."

"During our inspections, we noticed unusual load patterns -- load dropped from feeders early in the morning but surged between 10pm and 4am. This led us to identify key locations and conduct nighttime checks. Just two days ago, we registered 42 more cases of electricity theft," he added.

PHOTO: PTI

Earlier, an FIR was lodged against Samajwadi Party leader and Sambhal's Lok Sabha MP Ziaur Rahman Barq also for alleged power theft at his home in the city following an inspection by the electricity department officials. —*PTI*

SUSPICION OVER DEATH

Body of self-styled Kerala godman exhumed

T'PURAM, 16 JAN

Kerala police exhumed the body of a 69-year-old self-proclaimed, godman who was entombed in a concrete chamber by his family after they claimed he had attained samadhi, near Neyyattinkara in the capital district.

Under tight security, police unearthed the grave and recovered the body, reportedly identified as that of Gopan Swami.

It was shifted to Thiruvananthapuram Medical College Hospital for a post-mortem.

Earlier, police deployed a large contingent of personnel in the area along with a medical team led by a forensic surgeon.

During the exhumation, the body was discovered in a sitting position. Several pooja items, including 'vibhuti' (sacred ash), were reportedly found inside the grave.

Under tight security, police unearthed the grave and recovered the body, reportedly identified as that of Gopan Swami PHOTO: X

Following the protests from family members and a section of residents, police temporarily halted the exhumation proceedings on Monday.

Subsequently, the family approached Kerala High Court seeking an order to prevent the police from attempting to demolish the 'samadhi'. However, the court declined to interfere with the investigation.

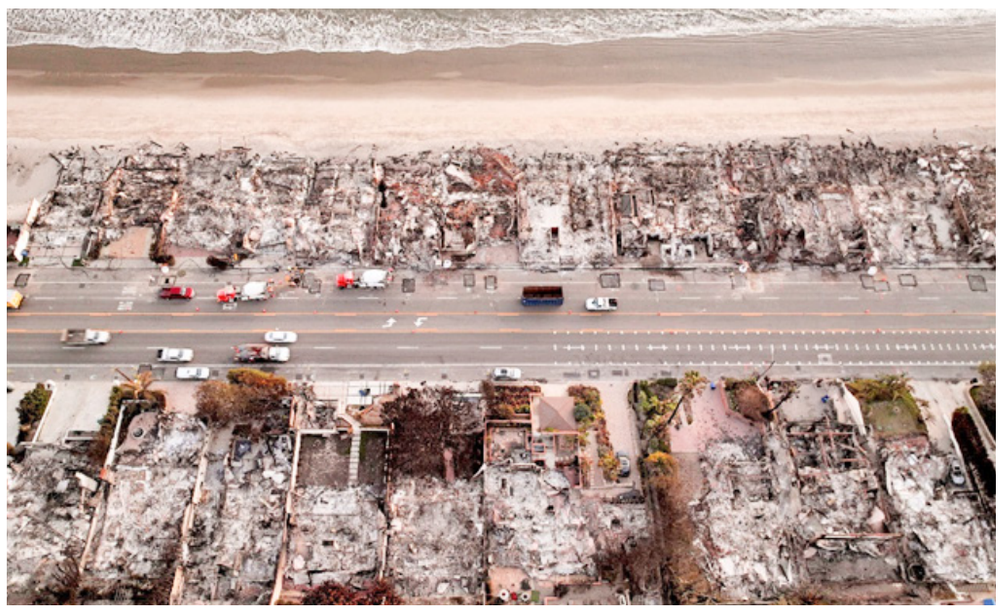
The court stated that probe agencies have the authority to investigate cases involving individuals who go missing or die under suspicious circumstances.

The incident came to light after posters near the man's residence proclaimed, "Gopan Swami has attained samadhi."

Police registered a missing case and decided to exhume the body following complaints from residents alleging foul play in his death.

Gopan's son, Rajasenan, claimed that his father walked to the burial site around 11.30pm on Friday and entered samadhi.

He told the media that Gopan had instructed the family to keep his body away from public view and bury it in the grave. —*PTI*



LANDSCAPES NOW HELLSCAPES

An aerial view shows the devastation from the Palisades Fire on beachfront homes in Malibu, California. Authorities have confirmed at least 25 deaths so far, with the toll expected to rise as fires continue to rage across parts of the city
PHOTO: PTI

Pollution, water quality in focus ahead of Delhi polls

Ahead of Delhi Assembly polls on 5 February, residents across the national capital have raised concerns over a range of civic issues,including poor road conditions, water quality and rising pollution levels.

Mohammad Sadiq, a resident of Seelampur in northeast Delhi, highlighted the ongoing issue of contaminated water.

"We have electricity, but the water quality is very poor. We have to buy clean water for drinking and cooking, which costs between Rs 30 to Rs 50 per day. The condition of the roads in our area is another major concern. We expects the next government to resolve these issues," he said.

Another resident from Hardevpuri, Durgapuri in northeast Delhi, Harsh Tyagi, pointed to multiple problems, including narrow lanes, lack of parking, and insufficient green cover.

"The pollution level in our area is high due to the lack of trees. The narrow lanes leads to parking congestion congestion and there is no proper drainage system," Tyagi said.

In northwest Delhi, Nisha Sharma, expressed concerns about bad roads and stray cattle.

"While we have access to electricity and clean water, the roads are in poor condition, with potholes everywhere. The main roads are fine, but the inner lanes in Trinagar and Wazirpur are in bad shape. Stray cattle is also a challenge, making it difficult to navigate through the area," Sharma said.

Environmental advocate Verhean Khanna, founder of the New Delhi Nature Society, stressed the importance of reducing reducing waste and increasing greenery to tackle pollution.

"We have to produce less amount of garbage, especially the plastic waste. There are some garbages which we cannot avoid. We need a proper and separate channels for disposing electronic wastes and biodegradable waste can be converted into fertiliser," Khanna said.

Strictest anti-pollution curbs under stage 4 of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) like a ban on contruction activities are imposed in Delhi-NCR to combat worsening air pollution levels ***PHOTO: PTI***

- People are forced to buy clean water for drinking and cooking, which costs between Rs 30 to Rs 50 per day. There's also the issue of hanging wires and electric poles

"We have set up three pits in a park at our colony where we are converting the biodegradable waste, which we collect from the houses of the society, into fertilisers," he added.

Khushboo Tiwari, a resident of Chhatarpur, voiced concerns over drainage overflow during monsoons.

She said the Mehrauli-Gurgaon Road sees major traffic congestion, especially during peak hours. Additionally, the drainage system overflows during rains, creating difficulties for the residents.

There's also the issue of hanging wires and electric poles near homes, posing safety risks, she added. Tiwari further claimed that there is no park in their area for the residents.

Bittu Bhardwaj, a resident of southwest Delhi, said that after Anand Vihar, Palam is the most polluted area in the national capital.

"There is a lot of construction ongoing in this part of the city which causes high pollution level in the area. Palam is the second most polluted area in the national capital following Anand Vihar. The roads are in bad condition leading to traffic congestion in the locality," Bhardwaj said.

Sunil Kumar Aledia, executive director, Centre for Holistic Development, called for collective participation to address the pollution and civic issues in Delhi.

He said the population density is increasing leading to extra burden on the waste creation in several forms posing a significant challenge.

The issue of climate change is not being properly addressed due to which the society is getting impacted, he he added.

"We need to have proper planning and participation of all stakeholders of the society to deal with the rising civic issues. We also need to aware people before seeking their participation. There are garbage mountains in Delhi which are not being disposed off properly," Aledia said.

He further said that the government should have a proper plan regarding the vehicles in the national capital. Voting for Delhi Assembly elections will take place on 5 February, with counting to be held on February *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Bezos' Blue Origin launches rocket on first test flight

Blue Origin launched its massive new rocket on its first test flight Thursday, sending up a prototype satellite to orbit thousands of miles above Earth.

Named after the first American to orbit Earth, the New Glenn rocket blasted off from Florida, soaring from the same pad used to launch NASA's Mariner and Pioneer spacecraft a half-century ago.

Years in the making with heavy funding by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, the 98-metre rocket carried an an experimental platform designed to host satellites or release them into their proper orbits. All seven main engines fired at liftoff as the rocket blazed through the predawn sky, drawing cheers from spectators lining the nearby beaches. Company employees erupted in shouts and frenzied applause once the craft successfully orbit 13 minutes later, a feat that drew quick praise from SpaceX's Elon Musk.

"Congratulations on reaching orbit on the first attempt!" Musk said via X.

For this test, the satellite was expected to remain inside the second stage while circling Earth. The mission was expected to last six hours, with the second stage then placed in a safe condition to stay in a high, out-of-the-way orbit in accordance with NASA's practices for minimising space junk. The first-stage booster missed its landing on a barge in the Atlantic minutes after liftoff so it could be recycled, but the company stressed that the more important goal was for the test satellite to reach orbit. Bezos said before the flight it was "a little crazy" to even try to land the booster on the first try.

New Glenn was supposed to fly before dawn Monday, but ice buildup in critical plumbing caused a delay. The rocket is built to haul spacecraft and eventually astronauts to orbit and also the moon.

Founded 25 years ago by Bezos, Blue Origin has been launching paying passengers to the edge of space since 2021, including himself. The short hops from Texas use smaller rockets named after the first American in space, Alan Shepard. New Glenn, which honors John Glenn, is five times taller.

Blue Origin poured more than USD1 billion into New Glenn's launch site, rebuilding historic Complex 36 at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station. The pad is 14 km from the company's control centres and rocket factory, outside the gates of NASA's Kennedy Space Center.

Blue Origin envisions six to eight New Glenn flights this year, if everything goes well, with the next one coming up this spring.

"There's room for lots of winners" Bezos said from the rocket factory over the weekend, adding that this was the "very, very beginning of this new phase of the space age, where we're all going to work together as an industry ... to lower the cost of access to space."

The biggest rocket of all, at approximately 123m, is SpaceX's Starship. Musk said the seventh test flight of the full rocket could occur later Thursday from Texas. He hopes to repeat what he pulled off in October, catching the returning booster at the launch pad with giant mechanical arms.

Starship is what NASA plans to use to land astronauts on the moon later this decade. The first two moon landings under the space agency's Artemis program, which follows the Apollo missions of the 1960s and 1970s, will see crews descending from lunar orbit to the surface in Starships.

Blue Origin's lander, dubbed Blue Moon, will make its debut on the third lunar touchdown by astronauts.

NASA Administrator Bill Nelson pushed for competing moon landers similar to the strategy to hire two companies to ferry astronauts to and from the International Space Station. Nelson will step down when President-elect Donald Trump takes office on Monday.

Trump has tapped tech billionaire Jared Isaacman to run NASA. Isaacman, who has twice rocketed into orbit on his own privately financed SpaceX flights, must be approved by the Senate. New Glenn's debut was supposed to send twin spacecraft to Mars for NASA. But the space agency pulled them from last October's planned flight when it became clear the rocket wouldn't be ready in time. They will still fly on a New Glenn rocket, but not until spring at the earliest. The two small spacecraft, named Escapade, are meant to study the Martian atmosphere and magnetic environment while orbiting the red planet. *—PTI*

Blue Origin's New Glenn rocket lifts off from Launch Complex 36 at the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, on Thursday in Cape Canaveral, Florida ***PHOTO: PTI***

US TikTok users flock to Chinese app RedNote amid ban concerns

Social media giant TikTok is preparing to shut down its app in the United States this Sunday – the day that legislation signed by President Joe Biden last year banning the app takes effect.

There is a slim chance this dramatic development might not happen if the US Supreme Court accepts a last minute legal argument from TikTok's Chinese owner, ByteDance, that the ban is unconstitutional – or if ByteDance divests its US operations.

But the 170 million users of TikTok in the US aren't taking any chances. Many self-described "TikTok refugees" have begun to flee to alternative social media sites, mocking the alleged security concerns on TikTok in the process. "Goodbye to my Chinese spy" has become a new TikTok trend.

The most popular alternative that has emerged is the Chinese social media app Xiaohongshu (known as RedNote in English). On 13 January, the app surged to number one in the US Apple App Store, attracting more than 7,00,000 new users.

This mass digital migration of social media users marks a new phase in the ongoing digital cold war between the US and China. But there are many questions about whether RedNote – or any other alternative platform – will be a viable, long-term refuge for US TikTok users if the ban goes ahead.

Owned by Shanghai-based Xingyin Information Technology and established in 2013, RedNote is a Chinese-language lifestyle, social networking and e-commerce platform. It has a hybrid style of Instagram-meets-Pinterest and approximately 300 million monthly active users – the majority of whom are in China.

RedNote stores its users' personal data in China, in compliance with China's data protection and cybersecurity laws and other regulatory policies.

But RedNote isn't the only alternative platform users are migrating to. Another is Lemon8, also owned by ByteDance, which bills itself as a "lifestyle community".

First launched in Japan in 2020, it had the second top spot in the Apple App Store – after RedNote – earlier this week. The app allows existing TikTok users to migrate their account handles and data.

Like TikTok, Lemon8 stores data of users outside China, including in the US and Singapore. However, if the US government does ban TikTok it could easily use the same rationale to ban Lemon8.

Other local US-based alternative platforms, such as Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, are not seen as ideal options by many users. This is because they are less creator-friendly and lack a strong sense of community.

An alternative to TikTok, Rednote was launched on 13 January which surged to number one in the US Apple App Store, attracting more than 7,00,000 new users ***PHOTO: X***

Many see RedNote as the best alternative given its similar content style and algorithms to TikTok and community-driven appeal. More importantly, the platform is beyond the control of the US government and cannot be directly banned.

At the time of writing, the hashtag "TikTok refugee" had garnered about 250 million views and over 5.5 million comments on RedNote. Some US users satirically explained their move to the platform out of spite: since the US government is worried about our personal data being taken by China, let's just hand it directly over to the Chinese government. Are you going to take away my mobile?

Chinese users of RedNote are enthusiastically embracing TikTok refugees from the US.

For example, they are producing tutorial videos to teach new users how to navigate the app. This hospitality is summed up by one popular comment from a Chinese user on the platform who said: "friends who come over from TikTok, I want to say, you are not refugees, you are brave explorers." The new migration to RedNote has also intensified national pride of Chinese internet users.

They vividly refer to the migration as a "Western awakening movement", which allows US citizens to open their eyes to see the world outside the centre of the west.

This phrase was coined in reference to the "self-strengthening movement" in China in the late 19th century – a reform effort aimed at modernising China by adopting Western technologies, knowledge and values. The unexpected migration has seen some RedNote-related stocks surge by as much as 20 per cent earlier this week. The positive interactions between American and Chinese internet users help promote the Communist Party of China's idea of "people-to-people diplomacy". This idea is best summed up by Chinese President Xi Jinping, who in July 2024 said: "The hope of the China-US relationship lies in the people, its foundation is in the two societies, its future depends on the youth, and its vitality comes from exchanges at subnational levels." However, RedNote might not be a viable, long-term refuge for US TikTok users.

Their sudden migration to RedNote could be more like a flash mob protest against the TikTok ban. It may not be easy for them to get used to a very different digital ecosystem – and make a decision to permanently reside on the Chinese app. RedNote has already posted a job ad to urgently recruit content moderators who understand English to cope with the dramatic growth of English-speaking users.

It's also worth nothing that the migration to RedNote is still very small, and only a fraction of the 170 million people in the US who use TikTok.

The US government also has the authority to pressure Apple to remove RedNote from the US App Store if it thinks the migration poses a national security threat.Regardless of whether this happens, the mass migration of TikTok refugees to RedNote – even if it is temporary – shows the US's regulation of digital technologies, driven by geopolitical competition, has significantly fractured the global internet. Fortunately, we have witnessed the spirit of optimism and humanitarianism among US and Chinese internet users amid the tension of the digital cold war. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

German cops probe AfD's mock plane ticket campaign

BERLIN, 16 JAN

Authorities in Germany have initiated a criminal investigation following the distribution of around 30,000 fake "deportation" flight tickets by the nationalist Alternative for Germany (AfD) party in Karlsruhe. The mock tickets resemble actual boarding passes and feature a one-way flight from "Germany" to a "safe country of origin" for a passenger named "illegal immigrant," scheduled for 23 February, coinciding with a snap federal election. Local politicians condemned the initiative as incitement to hatred, with the Left Party planning to file charges. Karlsruhe Mayor Frank Mentrup labelled the campaign as crossing a line, exacerbating fear within the community. *—DW News*

IS linked rebels kill at least 10 people in Congo

GOMA, 15 JAN

At least 10 people were killed in eastern Congo by extremist rebels linked to the Islamic State group, a local official said on Wednesday. The rebels with the Allied Democratic Forces, an IS affiliate in the region, attacked the village of Makoko in the Lubero territory of the North Kivu province on Wednesday, a provincial member of parliament, David Sikuli, told The Associated Press. Eastern Congo has struggled with armed violence for decades as more than 120 groups fight for power, land and valuable mineral resources, while others try to defend their communities. Some armed groups have been accused of mass killings. The violence has caused nearly 7 million people to flee their homes. *—PTI*

Cuba begins prisoners' release amid US policy shift

HAVANA, 16 JAN

Cuba commenced the release of several prisoners on Wednesday as part of dialogues facilitated by the Vatican. More than a dozen individuals, including tattooist Reyna Yacnara Barreto Batista, who was arrested during the historic 2021 protests, were set free. Barreto, sentenced to four years for public disorder, reported that she and eight men were informed of their release early in the morning. This move follows the announcement from President Joe Biden's administration regarding plans to revoke Cuba's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism. While the Cuban government stated the releases were not directly linked to the US decision, it cited the spirit of an upcoming Jubilee declared by Pope. *—PTI*

Drake sues Universal Music over diss track

LOS ANGELES, 16 JAN

A major hip-hop feud escalated as Drake has filed a lawsuit against Universal Music Group (UMG) for defamation linked to rival Kendrick Lamar's diss track "Not Like Us." The suit claims UMG promoted the track despite false allegations of pedophilia against Drake, which allegedly incited violence, including a shooting at his Toronto home. Drake's grievance, filed in federal court in New York City, seeks damages and accountability from UMG for its role in disseminating the track's dangerous content. UMG refuted the claims, asserting it has invested significantly in Drake's career. The legal action comes as the track is nominated for five Grammys, amidst escalating tensions between the two artists. Drake's legal team argued that UMG prioritised profits over artist safety. *—PTI*

Last minute crisis delays ceasefire: Bibi

Meanwhile, Hamas officials say that the group is committed to the ceasefire agreement

TEL AVIV, 16 JAN

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced on Thursday that a "last-minute crisis" with Hamas is hindering Israeli approval of a long-anticipated agreement aimed at pausing hostilities in the Gaza Strip and facilitating the release of dozens of hostages. In the meantime, Israeli airstrikes resulted in the deaths of at least 48 people across the heavily bombarded region, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

Netanyahu's office stated that his Cabinet will not convene to endorse the ceasefire agreement until Hamas demonstrates compliance. Officials accused the militant group of reneging on aspects of the deal in a bid for further concessions. In response, Izzat al-Rashq, a senior Hamas representative, affirmed the group's commitment to the ceasefire announced by mediating parties, including the US and Qatar.

The deal, unveiled aims to secure the release of 33 hostages from Gaza and facilitate the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. It also proposes a phased withdrawal of Israeli forces from several areas, allowing hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians to return to their homes and significantly increasing humanitarian assistance.

Despite the potential breakthroughs, Netanyahu faces domestic pressure to bring hostages home amid threats from Far-Right coalition partners to destabilise his government should he concede too much. Around half of the casualties were reported to be women and children, with the toll expected to rise as records are updated. Since the onset of the conflict on 7 October, 2023, following a surprise attack by Hamas, approximately 1,200 people, predominantly civilians, have been killed and around 250 abducted. Ongoing Israeli military actions have resulted in the deaths of over 46,000 individuals in Gaza, mostly civilians, as reported by the Health Ministry, prompting heavy international scrutiny.

Mediators from Egypt, Qatar, and the US are expected to reconvene in Cairo to iron out remaining details. The long-term governance and reconstruction of Gaza remains uncertain, with many questions about its future still unanswered. *—PTI*

A woman embraces the body of her 7-year-old son who was killed in the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip **PHOTO: PTI**

The deal was merely a step forward. We will continue to work until all terms of the agreement are applied, until we have achieved peace & are able to turn the last page of war
—Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, Qatar PM

The UN stands ready to support the implementation of this deal and scale up the delivery of humanitarian relief to the countless Palestinians who continue to suffer
— Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General

For the innocent Palestinians whose homes turned into a warzone overnight and the many who have lost their lives, this ceasefire must allow for a huge surge in humanitarian aid
— Keir Starmer, UK PM

The ceasefire provides an important opportunity to substantially increase humanitarian assistance to the civilian population of Gaza
— Giorgia Meloni, Italy PM

After fifteen months of unjustifiable suffering, there is immense relief for the people of Gaza and hope for the hostages and their families in the wake of the ceasefire deal
— Emmanuel Macron, French President

FOCUS ON DEFENCE

UK's Starmer in Ukraine; pledges 100-year partnership

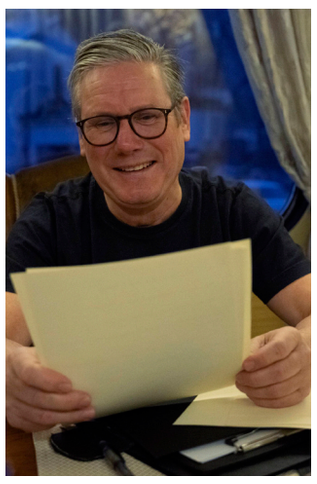
KYIV, 16 JAN

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer arrived in Ukraine's capital on Thursday, announcing a commitment to secure the country's future for a century, just days before Donald Trump is inaugurated as US President.

Starmer and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy are set to sign a "100-Year Partnership" treaty in Kyiv, focusing on defence, science, energy, and trade. This marks Starmer's first visit to Ukraine since he took office in July, having previously met with Zelenskyy while in opposition.

Welcomed at Kyiv railway station by UK Ambassador Martin Harris and Ukraine's envoy to London, Valerii Zaluzhnyi, Starmer reiterated the UK's strong support. Since Russia's invasion three years ago, the UK has pledged £12.8 billion (approximately USD 16 billion) in military and civilian aid and trained over 50,000 Ukrainian troops. Starmer will also announce an additional £40 million (USD 49 million) for Ukraine's postwar recovery.

However, uncertainty looms over US support under Trump, who has questioned the cost of assistance and expressed a desire to swiftly end the conflict. Kyiv's allies are working to bolster Ukraine's position for potential future negotiations.



Keir Starmer **PHOTO: PTI**

Starmer stated that the partnership aims to ensure Ukraine "is never again vulnerable" to Russian aggression, citing the historical context of Crimea's annexation in 2014. Key aspects of the treaty include enhanced cooperation on maritime security and the tracking of stolen Ukrainian grain exported by Russia.

Zelenskyy and Starmer are also expected to discuss a proposal for Western troops to monitor a potential ceasefire, alongside Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership. *—PTI*

Biden warns of rising oligarchy

WASHINGTON DC, 16 JAN

In a poignant farewell address, outgoing President Joe Biden cautioned against the rise of an ultra-wealthy "oligarchy" in America, which he believes threatens the nation's democracy as he prepares to hand power to President-elect Donald Trump.

Biden, who will be succeeded by Trump on 20 January, expressed concerns over the alarming concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few individuals. "There are dangerous consequences if their abuse of power is left unchecked," he stated, highlighting the potential detrimental effects on democracy and citizens' rights.

Joe Biden **PHOTO: X**

He specifically mentioned the growing influence of billionaire tech figures, including Elon Musk, and raised alarms over social media companies' roles in spreading misinformation. He compared the potential emergence of a "tech industrial complex" to the military industrial complex outlined by former President Dwight D Eisenhower in 1961. *—PTI*

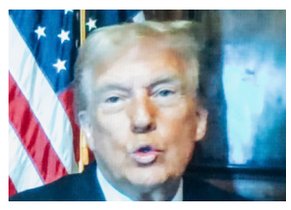
Trump, Biden claim credit for truce deal

WASHINGTON DC, 16 JAN

US President Joe Biden and president-elect Donald Trump are both claiming credit for Israel and Hamas agreeing to a ceasefire deal in Gaza on Wednesday after the White House brought Trump's Middle East envoy into negotiations that have dragged on for months.

Trump wasted no time in asserting he was the moving force behind the deal. Biden, meanwhile, stressed that the deal was reached under "the precise contours" of a plan that he set out in late May.

"This ceasefire agreement could have only happened as a result of our Historic Victory in November, as it signaled to the entire World that my Administration would seek Peace and negotiate deals to ensure the safety of all Americans, and our Allies," Trump wrote on social media. He added his incoming Mideast envoy, Steve Witkoff - who was participating in the talks in Doha, Qatar - would continue "to work closely with Israel and our Allies to make sure Gaza NEVER again becomes a terrorist safe haven." *—PTI*



Donald Trump **PHOTO: X**

US RECOVERS $31M IN SOCIAL SECURITY PAYMENTS TO THE DEAD

WASHINGTON DC, 16 JAN

The US government clawed back more than USD 31 million in Social Security payments that improperly went to dead people, a recovery that one official said Wednesday was "just the tip of the iceberg."

The money was reclaimed as part of a five-month pilot program after Congress gave the Department of Treasury temporary access to the Social Security Administration 's "Full Death Master File" for three years as part of the omnibus appropriations bill in 2021.

The SSA maintains the most complete federal database of individuals who have died, and the file contains more than 142 million records, which go back to 1899, according to the Treasury. *—PTI*

US REMOVES SANCTIONS ON BARC, TWO OTHER INDIAN COMPANIES

WASHINGTON DC, 16 JAN

Days ahead of passing the baton of the presidency to Donald Trump, the Biden administration has announced lifting sanctions on three Indian entities - Indian Rare Earths, Indira Gandhi Atomic Research Center (IGCAR), and Bhabha Atomic Research Center (BARC).

Imposed during the Cold War era, the removal of sanctions on these three Indian entities will support US foreign policy objectives by reducing barriers to advanced energy cooperation, including joint research and development and science and technology cooperation, towards shared energy security needs and goals, the Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) said on Wednesday. *—PTI*

Yoon skips questioning post-arrest

SEOUL, 16 JAN

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol will not attend a second round of questioning scheduled for Thursday, following his dramatic arrest over a failed martial law declaration in December. His lawyer, Yoon Kab-keun, informed the press that the President is unwell and believes he has already fully articulated his position during previous interrogations.

Yoon was arrested on Wednesday, making him the first sitting South Korean president to be detained. During hours of questioning, Yoon exercised his right to remain silent, subsequently being moved to the Seoul Detention Centre. Authorities are permitted to detain him for 48 hours without a new warrant, which could extend for another 20 days should they proceed with formal charges. Concurrently, the Constitutional Court is set to hold a second hearing in impeachment trial, determining his potential removal from presidential office. *—PTI*

Death toll rises to 87 in SA's police and miners' standoff

STILFONTEIN, 16 JAN

The death toll from a protracted standoff between police and illegally working miners at an abandoned gold mine in South Africa has climbed to at least 87, authorities confirmed on Thursday. This follows the conclusion of an operation that extracted over 240 survivors from deep underground.

It is believed that many miners perished from starvation and dehydration, having been underground at the Buffelsfontein Gold Mine, located southwest of Johannesburg, since August last year. While police stated that nearly 2,000 miners had been working illegally, most survivors have since been arrested. *—PTI*

China offers to invest $3.7B in S Lanka's oil refinery

BEIJING, 16 JAN

China has offered to invest USD 3.7 billion in Sri Lanka, stated to be the biggest-ever foreign investment in the island nation, to build a state-of-the-art oil refinery as the two countries signed a new plan to upgrade BRI cooperation during Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's state visit here.

On Thursday, Dissanayake met Chinese Premier Li Qiang and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress Zhao Leji and pitched for more Chinese investment in his address to Chinese firms.

A day earlier, Dissanayake held talks with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping following which the two sides signed 15 agreements. According to Sri Lankan President's media division, his visit marked a "significant milestone" by securing the largest foreign direct investment to date of USD 3.7 billion Chinese investment to build a state-of-the-art oil refinery at Hambantota.

"This significant achievement was formalised this morning with the signing of an agreement between Sri Lanka's Ministry of Energy and Sinopec, a leading Chinese international petroleum corporation," it said. *—PTI*

'TO MAKE COUNTRY CLEAN'

Morocco to cull 3M dogs ahead of FIFA World Cup

RABAT, 16 JAN

Morocco is all set to slaughter three million stray dogs in a brutal clean up bid before hosting the 2030 World Cup.

The initiative aims to make the country's cities look nicer to visiting football fans.

Morocco will co-host the 2030 FIFA World Cup alongside Spain and Portugal, marking the tournament's centennial edition.

The country has already begun preparing its infrastructure, aiming to upgrade stadiums and transportation networks to meet FIFA standards.

But it has also reportedly killed thousands of stray dogs, and it's feared that the numbers could still ramp up as 2030 approaches.

According to the coalition, dogs are poisoned with strychnine - a highly toxic, colourless, and bitter chemical used as a pesticide, particularly for killing small animals such as birds and rodents.

The pups are also reportedly shot in the streets, the coalition says, or trapped and transported to facilities where they're brutally slaughtered.

With outrage mounting, activists are demanding immediate action to end the slaughter and protect Morocco's stray dogs.

Jane Goodall, a top animal rights advocate, has now written to FIFA, urging immediate action and accusing the organisation of ignoring what she describes as "a horrific act of barbarity".

In her letter to FIFA's Secretary general Mattias Grafström, Goodall said she was appalled at reports of large-scale dog killings by Moroccan authorities, an initiative said to have ended last August.

"I am equally appalled to learn from the IAWPC - International Animal Coalition that you have been presented with detailed dossiers documenting these horrific acts, most of which are conducted in the most brutal and cruel fashion imaginable, and yet appear to have ignored them," she wrote. *—Agencies*

Activists are demanding immediate action to end the slaughter and protect Morocco's stray dogs **PHOTO: X**

Gold rallies ₹500; silver soars ₹2,300

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Gold prices rallied Rs 500 to hit over a two-month high of Rs 81,300 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid fresh buying from jewellers and retailers and rupee depreciation, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal had closed at Rs 80,800 per 10 grams on Wednesday. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity climbed Rs 500 to Rs 80,900 per 10 grams. It settled at Rs 80,400 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. Silver also surged Rs 2,300 to Rs 94,000 per kg from the previous close of Rs 91,700 per kg on Wednesday. Meanwhile, gold contracts for February delivery rose Rs 297, or 0.38 per cent, to Rs 79,007 per 10 grams in the futures trade on the MCX on Thursday. Globally, Comex gold futures increased USD 19.70 per ounce, to USD 2,737.50 per ounce. *—PTI*

Rupee declines 16P to settle at 86.56 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 16 JAN

The rupee depreciated 16 paise to close at 86.56 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, dragged down by a strong American currency overseas, elevated crude oil prices and foreign fund outflows. However, positive domestic equity markets provided some cushion at the lower level, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.42 and touched the intraday high of 86.37 before ending the session at 86.56 (provisional) against the greenback, 16 paise lower from the previous close. The local unit settled with a gain of 13 paise at 86.40 against the dollar on Wednesday, a day after rebounding 17 paise from its lowest-ever level. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.05 per cent higher at 108.97. *—PTI*

Dublin's Inspeq AI opens office in Bengaluru

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Dublin-headquartered AI-safety startup Inspeq AI on Thursday announced its foray into the India market with its first office in Bengaluru. The office with 25 staffers plans to hire additional 50 employees over the next few months across engineering (software and service), operations and client-facing roles, the company said in a statement. This will be the company's third global office, following the ones in Dublin and London. Founded in 2023 by Apoorva Kumar and Ramanujam Macharla Vijayakumar, Inspeq AI is an AI infrastructure firm. It provides an enterprise-ready LLM Ops platform to help developers integrate AI safely and responsibly in their enterprise AI applications. The platform claims to accelerate the development of generative AI applications by up to four times and reduce development costs by as much as 70 per cent. *—PTI*

India's economy to grow at 6.4% in current fiscal: FICCI

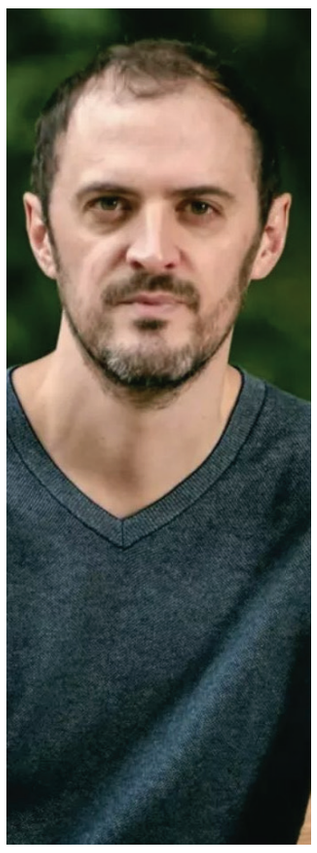
NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Industry body FICCI on Thursday lowered India's growth projection for the current financial year to 6.4 per cent from 7 per cent estimated earlier. According to FICCI's Economic Outlook Survey, the revised projection is in line with the broad expectations and reflect a notable slowdown vis-à-vis 8.2 per cent GDP growth recorded in 2023–24. The survey was conducted in December 2024 and drew responses from leading economists representing industry, banking and financial services sector. The likelihood of tax cuts (personal and business) could inflate the US fiscal deficit, while higher tariffs and stricter immigration norms could push up labour costs and inflation, the participants observed. *—PTI*

Hindenburg brought Adani from 4th to 20th richest

Shook some empires that needed shaking, says founder

WASHINGTON/NEW DELHI, 16 JAN



The report published by US-based Hindenburg Research, accusing the Adani Group of "pulling the largest con in the corporate history", wiped out more than USD 150B in value of the group's shares at their lowest point. Adani was ranked world's fourth-richest and Asia's wealthiest person a day before the Hindenburg report. On Thursday, with a net worth of USD 75B, he was ranked at No.20.

"There is not one specific thing – no particular threat, no health issue and no big personal issue," Hindenburg Research founder Nate Anderson wrote about his firm's closure in a letter posted on the firm's website.

"The intensity and focus has come at the cost of missing a lot of the rest of the world and the people I care about. I now view Hindenburg as a chapter in my life, not a central thing that defines me."

A graduate of international business management from the University of Connecticut, Nathan (Nate) Anderson founded a "forensic financial research" firm to specialise in spotting wrongdoings and frauds, or what it calls man-made disasters, at companies around the globe and taking market bets against them.

Anderson named his firm after the German airship, Hindenburg, which caught fire and crashed in 1937 in what was seen as a man-made disaster as some 100 people were loaded on the balloon filled with hydrogen – the most flammable material in the universe.

Hindenburg in 2020 went after electric truck maker Nikola, leading to a US jury convicting its founder Trevor Milton of fraud.

This month, it went after Ernie Garcia III's Carvana Co, accusing him and his father, Ernie Garcia II, of an "accounting grift for the ages". The auto retailers denied allegations and its stock soon recovered.

Hindenburg's past targets include Lordstown Motors Corp (US), Kandi (China), Clover Health (US) and Tecnoglass (Colombia). In 2023, it shorted Carl Icahn's Icahn Enterprises and Jack Dorsey-led Block.

"We shook some empires that we felt needed shaking," Anderson wrote, adding that nearly 100 people had been charged by regulators "at least in part" because of Hindenburg's work.

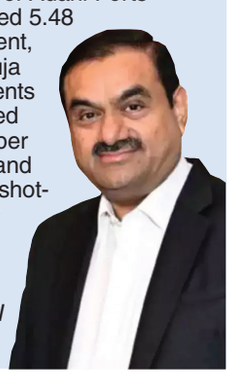
Anderson said he's winding up his firm after working through the last of its ideas and handing off tips on suspected ponzi to regulators.

Over the next six months, he plans to work on a series of videos and materials on Hindenburg's model, so others can learn how the firm conducted investigations. *—PTI*

> **'Kitne ghazi aaye, kitne ghazi gaye' (many conquerors came, many conquerors have gone)**
>
> - Jugeshinder Singh, Adani Group Chief Financial Officer said in a cryptic post

Adani stocks rally as Hindenburg downs shutters

Adani group stocks rallied on Thursday morning after Hindenburg Research, a US investment research firm whose reports resulted in wiping out billions of dollars of Gautam Adani and his companies, has been shut down. Shares of Adani Power surged 9.21 per cent, Adani Green Energy soared 8.86 per cent, Adani Enterprises climbed 7.72 per cent, Adani Total Gas jumped 7.10 per cent, NDTV rallied 7 per cent and Adani Energy Solutions advanced 6.63 per cent on the BSE. The stock of Adani Ports climbed 5.48 per cent, Ambuja Cements jumped 4.55 per cent and ACC shot-up by 4.14 per cent *—PTI*



HOPES OF US RATE CUTS

Mkts extend gains for 3rd day on strong global cues

MUMBAI, 16 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rallied for the third session on the trot, helped by a rally in global markets after lower-than-expected consumer inflation in the US ignited hopes of more rate cuts by the Federal Reserve.

The 30-share BSE index climbed 318.74 points or 0.42 per cent to revisit 77,000 level at 77,042.82. During the day, it jumped 595.42 points or 0.77 per cent to 77,319.50.

On the similar lines, the NSE Nifty rallied 98.60 points or 0.42 per cent to 23,311.80.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Adani Ports, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finserv, Bharti Airtel, Tata Motors, IndusInd Bank, NTPC, Maruti, Reliance Industries and Axis Bank were the biggest gainers.

In contrast, HCL Tech, Nestle, Infosys, Hindustan Unilever, ITC and Tata Consultancy Services were among the laggards.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory.

Equity markets in Europe were quoting higher. US markets rallied on Wednesday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,533.49 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.18 per cent to USD 81.88 a barrel. *—PTI*

Infosys Q3 net profit rises 11.5%

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

IT services major Infosys on Thursday reported an 11.46 per cent year-on-year increase in consolidated net profit to Rs 6,806 crore in the October-December quarter of FY25.

The company had posted a profit of Rs 6,106 crore in the corresponding period of the previous fiscal. *—PTI*

STEADY GROWTH

Global economy slide in 2025 not to affect India: WEF

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

PHOTO: X

A majority of chief economists worldwide expect weaker global economic conditions in 2025, but India is likely to maintain a strong growth despite signs of some momentum being lost, a new report said on Thursday.

In its latest Chief Economists Outlook, the World Economic Forum (WEF) said the global economy is set to face significant challenges in 2025, with 56 per cent of chief economists surveyed expecting conditions to weaken.

Only 17 per cent foresee an improvement, pointing to heightened uncertainty in key regions and the need for measured policy responses worldwide, it found.

The US economy is expected to deliver robust growth in 2025 and South Asia, particularly India, is also expected to maintain strong growth.

The outlook for Europe remains gloomy, with 74 per cent of respondents predicting weak or very weak growth this year.

The outlook for China also remains weak, and its growth is projected to slow gradually in the years ahead, the WEF said in the report prepared on the basis of consultations and surveys with leading chief economists from both the public and private sectors across the globe.

The report further said that South Asia continues to stand out, with 61 per cent of chief economists expecting strong or very strong growth in 2025.

"This regional performance has been driven largely by robust growth in India, which remains the world's fastest-growing major economy. However, there are now signs of some momentum being lost," the report said. *—PTI*

China's curbs on exports to hit solar, EV sectors

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

PHOTO: X

Indian firms in the electronics, solar, and electric vehicle (EV) sectors are experiencing delays and disruptions due to China's restrictions on export of key inputs and machinery, economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said on Thursday.

The GTRI said the curbs could be China's response to India's restrictions on Chinese investments and visas.

"This also signals deeper geopolitical tensions and trade war. We hope India-specific restrictions go away soon as they will also hurt China," GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said. While these measures impact India's electronics, solar, and EV sectors, they are also harmful to China's own manufacturing and exports, he said.

"Indian firms in electronics, solar, and EV sectors are facing delays and disruptions as China blocks exports of inputs," Srivastava said.

India must stay firm against unreasonable demands from China and focus on building local manufacturing capabilities, Srivastava said.

Srivastava said India is particularly vulnerable to China's export restrictions, as many of its industries depend on Chinese machinery, intermediate goods, and components.

India's imports from China increased to USD 101.73B in 2023–24 from USD 98.5B in 2022–23. *—PTI*

INTERNET USERS IN INDIA SET TO CROSS 900M

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

The internet user base in India is set to cross 900M this year, propelled by the growing use of Indic languages for digital content, says a report by IAMAI and KANTAR.

The 'Internet in India Report 2024,' reveals that the number of active internet users in India reached 886M in 2024, a robust eight per cent year-on-year growth.

Rural India, with 488M users, leads this growth and now accounts for 55 per cent of the total internet population.

Nearly all internet users (98 per cent) accessed content in Indic languages, with Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam emerging as the most popular.

The report says the digital gender gap in India is steadily narrowing, with 47 per cent of users being women. *—PTI*

JIO PARTNERS WITH POLYGON FOR WEB3 TECH

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Jio Platforms Ltd (JPL) has partnered with Polygon Labs for its debut in Web3 technology in India, the latter said on Thursday.

Under the partnership, the JPL plans to add Web3 capabilities to some of its existing applications and services, owned and operated by the Reliance Industries Limited Group firm, for its over 450M customers.

"Joining forces with Polygon Labs marks a significant milestone in Jio's journey towards digital excellence. We are excited to explore the bound-

Centre buys record 13.73LT soybean

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

- The procurement represents 41 per cent of the total sanctioned quantity of 33.85LT and has benefited 5.78 lakh farmers till 13 January of the 2024–25 kharif marketing season

The Centre has procured a record 13.73 lakh tonne (LT) of soybean under the Minimum Support Price (MSP) scheme so far in the current marketing season, a senior agriculture ministry official said on Thursday.

The procurement, which has been undertaken to protect farmers from falling prices, has surpassed all previous records, with the last highest being 19,483 tonne in 2018–19.

"In soybean, we have achieved an all-time high procurement under PSS (Price Support Scheme). This was possible due to special efforts the ministry took to create awareness in states," the ministry official said on condition of anonymity.

The procurement represents 41 per cent of the total sanctioned quantity of 33.85LT and has benefited 5.78 lakh farmers till 13 January of the 2024–25 kharif marketing season.

The procurement is being carried out through nodal agencies Nafed and NCCF at a support price of Rs 4,892 per quintal across six states.

Nafed has procured 9.78LT, while NCCF has procured about 3.94LT. *—PTI*

CCI dismisses dominance abuse plaint against Honda

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has dismissed a complaint accusing Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India (HMSI) of abusing its dominant position in its dealings with a Kerala-based trader.

The HMSI is a subsidiary of Japan's Honda Motor Co.

Rejecting the complaint, the competition watchdog said the allegations of coercion and unfair practices were related to contractual disputes and commercial matters, which are beyond the scope of the Competition Act.

"...the Commission directs that the matter be closed forthwith under Section 26(2) of the Act," CCI said on Tuesday.

Section 26(2) of the Act pertains to the case closure of a matter if a prima facie case is not made out.

The complainant, a former Suzuki Motorcycle India dealer, alleged the HMSI coerced him into terminating his Suzuki dealership to secure an HMSI dealership in 2017. He accused HMSI of forcing him to stock unpopular two-wheeler models, denying him business flexibility, and abruptly terminating the dealership agreement in January 2024 without justification.

The CCI said the individual's claims of coercion and unfair practices do not fall under the purview of the Act. *—PTI*

NCLAT to look into CCI fine on Meta, Whatsapp

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) on Thursday admitted the petitions filed by Meta Platforms and Whatsapp against an order passed by Competition Commission of India (CCI), imposing a penalty of Rs 213.14 crore for abuse of market dominance.

After hearing the initial submissions from Meta and CCI, a two-member bench of the NCLAT said the issue requires consideration.

"We find that the submission by the parties needs consideration. We admit both appeals," said the NCLAT bench, which included its Chairperson Justice Ashok Bhushan.

However, the NCLAT said it will decide next week on the interim relief to CCI order.

The counsel for Whatsapp and Meta Platform requested the tribunal to stay the CCI order.

The argument was opposed by the CCI counsel.

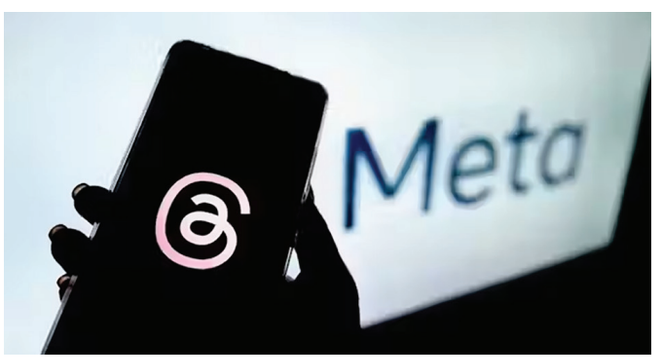
On 18 November, the CCI imposed a penalty of Rs 213.14 crore on Meta for unfair business ways with respect to the WhatsApp privacy policy update done in 2021.

Meta Platforms and Whatsapp have challenged this order before the NCLAT. *—ANI*

CONTENT MODERATION

Meta's 'community notes' shift risks health info

MELBOURNE, 16 JAN



Going forward, Meta platforms will rely on a user-sourced "community notes" model PHOTO: X

Last week, social media giant Meta announced major changes to its content moderation practices. This includes an end to its fact-checking programme, starting with the United States.

Meta's platforms, which include Facebook, Instagram and Threads, will no longer employ human fact-checkers and moderation teams, relying instead on a user-sourced "community notes" model. This is a similar method to current content moderation on X.

Meta's hateful conduct policy also changed last week to allow more "free speech". Advocate groups and experts warn this could lead to an increase in abusive and demeaning statements about Indigenous people, migrants and refugees, women and LGBTQIA+ people.

Many experts now also fear an increase in disinformation and misinformation on Meta's platforms.

Health content has been a focus of concern about online misinformation, particularly in relation to COVID. There has been less discussion of the potential impact of Meta's new policies on sexual and reproductive health info online – but the impacts could be profound.

Since the COVID pandemic, online platforms have been increasingly becoming important for sexual and reproductive health organisations.

On social media platforms, organisations such as Family Planning Australia can easily and inexpensively share factual information about sensitive and potentially stigmatising public health issues, including unplanned pregnancy and HIV. *—PTI*

Ireland fined 10% of match fee for slow over-rate in WODI

RAJKOT, 16 JAN

The Ireland women's cricket team was on Thursday fined 10 percent of its match fee for maintaining a slow over-rate in the third and final ODI against India, which the hosts won by a massive 304 runs to make a clean sweep of the series. The hosts, powered by fine centuries from Smriti Mandhana (135) and Pratika Rawal (154) on Wednesday, scored a mammoth 435/5, the highest total by an Indian team -- men's or women's -- in ODIs. Match Referee G S Lakshmi of the ICC International Panel of Match Referees imposed the fine after Ireland were found to be two overs short of the required target. *—PTI*

PHOTO:PTI

Indian Open pickelball match to begin from 3 Feb

MUMBAI, 16 JAN

The Indian Open League 2025 and Global Sports Pro and Challengers League were announced at a star-studded press conference on Thursday. The press conference was attended by eminent figures including filmmaker Karan Johar, who serves as the brand ambassador of the league; Hemal Jain, Founder of Global Sports Pickleball; Bollywood's acclaimed writer, director, and producer Shashank Khaitan, the co-founder of the league; and Yuvraj Ruia, a professional pickleball player. Scheduled to be held from 3 to 9 February, in Mumbai, the Indian Open League and Global Sports Pro and Challenger League at Nesco, Goregaon will feature over 1,800 players competing across various categories on more than 25 courts. A prize pool of 125,000 US Dollars is up for grabs. *—ANI*

RCB pick Charlie as replacement for injured Sophie

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Thursday picked Charlie Dean as a replacement for the injured Sophie Molineux for the upcoming Women's Premier League. Molineux will not feature in the third edition of the WPL due to knee injury, the franchise said. Dean represents England in international cricket and has played 36 T20Is, in addition to three Tests and 39 ODIs. The England all-rounder will join RCB for Rs 30 lakh. Australia's Molineux had earlier missed the ICC Women's Championship ODI series against New Zealand after sustaining the knee injury. *—PTI*

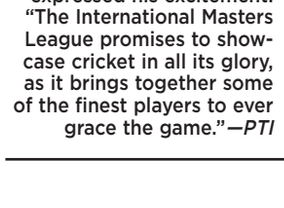


PHOTO:WIKIPEDIA

Tendulkar to lead India in Int'l Masters League

MUMBAI, 16 JAN

Cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar will lead the Indian team in the upcoming International Masters League which will be held in the country from 22 February to 16 March. The other teams participating in the tournament are Sri Lanka, Australia, England, South Africa, and the West Indies. Indian batting legend Sunil Gavaskar is the commissioner of the league. The DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai, the Niranjan Shah Stadium in Rajkot and the Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh International Stadium in Raipur will host the matches of the International Masters League. League commissioner Gavaskar expressed his excitement: "The International Masters League promises to showcase cricket in all its glory, as it brings together some of the finest players to ever grace the game." *—PTI*

Sindhu, Kiran enter quarterfinals

PV defeats Suizu at India Open 750

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu progressed to the quarterfinals, while Kiran George delivered a gritty performance to keep the home flag flying in men's singles at the India Open Super 750 badminton tournament here on Thursday.

Sindhu cruised past Japan's world No. 46 Manami Suizu with a 21-15, 21-13 win, while Kiran pulled off a stunning recovery, saving six game points to outlast Alex Lanier 22-20, 21-13 in the pre-quarterfinals.

Sindhu, a former world champion, will now face Paris Olympics bronze medallist Gregoria Mariska Tunjung, while Kiran will take on left-handed Chinese shuttler Hong Yang Weng in the next round.

Kiran's match against Alex started with the Frenchman leading 6-1 before a series of unforced errors allowed the Indian to claw back. Despite Alex using his smashes effectively, Kiran hung in and managed to close the gap. Alex led by three points at the interval, but Kiran showed remarkable mental resilience.

Sindhu made a strong start, leading 11-6 at the break. Although Suizu briefly narrowed the gap to 11-13 and 13-14, Sindhu was always a step ahead, with the Japanese player unable to cope with the Indian's powerful smashes. Sindhu continued to hit deep returns and used precise drops to trouble Suizu. Soon, she was 20-14 up and sealed the game when Suizu hit into the net.

After the change of sides, Sindhu raced to a 5-0 lead. The second game was all about Sindhu, as she quickly established a dominant 11-2 lead at the interval, and it became clear that Suizu had no answers to the Indian's relentless pressure. *—PTI*

SAYS MANDHANA

'Women must make this year their best in ODIs'

RAJKOT, 16 JAN

Smriti Mandhana believes India's back-to-back 3-0 series wins against the West Indies and Ireland have provided the perfect momentum for making it their "best year in one-dayers" as the team gears up for the 50-over World Cup at home.

India will host the women's ODI World Cup later this year and the team, which has been able to rediscover its form with six consecutive ODI wins, should drive home the advantage now, says Mandhana.

"Two 3-0 sweeps are definitely really good in a World Cup year especially. We have to like keep going and have this for the best year for one-days (dayers)," Mandhana said in a video shared by BCCI.

Mandhana (135) and Pratika Rawal (154) put on 233 for the first wicket for the third highest opening wicket partnership for India in ODIs, setting up their highest ever total of 435/5 and eventually for their biggest ever ODI win by 304 runs on Wednesday.

"I wanted to go out and bat with a lot of freedom. I said in the dugout before I went in about that you know, I'm going to try and play my shots because not many times you get an opportunity to do that," Mandhana said.

Talking about her 233-run opening stand with the senior batter, Rawal said, "It felt like that it was happening with the flow, we didn't think about it."

"We got to know stats now, actually," Mandhana added. *—PTI*

Indian hockey teams to kick off Pro League in Feb

BHUBANESWAR, 16 JAN

The Indian men's and women's hockey teams will commence their international assignments this year with the high-profile FIH Pro League matches here from 15 February.

The Indian men's team will face Spain, while their women counterparts will take on England on 15 February at the Kalinga Stadium.

Most of the Indian men's and women's team players are currently playing in the Hockey India League (HIL) in Rourkela and Ranchi respectively.

The Bhubaneswar leg of the FIH Pro League will be after the Australia leg (4-9 February) in Sydney.

Between 15 and 25 February, the men's teams of India, Spain, England, Germany and Ireland will go head-to-head with all teams reaching the half-way point of their season by the end of the Bhubaneswar stage.

"With 24 matches over the 11 days, the action will be unceasing among the top ranked teams in the world, which will be a true showcase of the 'League of the Best'."

The FIH Pro League action this year will begin in Australia. The Kookaburras, who won the title in the previous edition, will start off their defence against reigning Olympic champions Netherlands, and Spain.

The FIH Pro League action will also simultaneously continue in Argentina as the Bhubaneswar stage goes on, with Santiago del Estero hosting the final stage from the first half of the season from 19 to 24 February.

Locking horns in front of the large crowds will be Argentina, Belgium and Australia, in both the men's and women's competition. *—PTI*

Most of the Indian men's and women's team players are currently playing in the Hockey India League PHOTO:X/ @THEHOCKEYINDIA

Hero WPGT: Sneha takes lead with 2nd day's best card

KOLKATA, 16 JAN

Sneha Singh powered her way to the day's best round of 2-under 68 to take a one-shot lead in the second round of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour at the Tollygunge Club here on Thursday.

Sneha (71-68), who won the Hero Order of Merit in 2023, is now the only player under par at 1-under 139 and one shot clear of Vani Kapoor (68-72), the first-round leader.

Anvitha Narender, who broke through for her maiden pro title last season, moved into sole third with cards of 74-72.

Jasmine Shekar (74-73) and Ravjot K Dosanjh (72-75) were tied for fourth at 3-over 147.

Sneha, who last won on the Hero WPGT in February last year in the fourth leg, had an early bogey on the second hole.

She quickly made up with a birdie on the third and the eighth. A birdie on the 11th and the 15th made it 3-under for her but a dropped shot on the final hole saw her finish at 68. *—PTI*

Balaji, Reyes advance in 2nd round of Aus Open

MELBOURNE, 16 JAN

India's N Sriram Balaji and his Mexican partner Miguel Angel Reyes-Varela made a strong start in the men's doubles at the Australian Open, advancing to the second round with a convincing straight-sets victory over Robin Haase and Aleksandr Nedovyesov. The Indo-Mexican pairing won 6-4, 6-3 in just over an hour during their opening match.

Balaji and Reyes-Varela showcased their prowess by hitting 23 winners compared to their opponents' 16. After securing a vital break in the sixth game of the first set, they were briefly broken back, but a decisive backhand winner in the 10th game allowed them to clinch the set. In the second set, a costly unforced error from Haase and Nedovyesov gifted the duo another break in the eighth game, leading to a comfortable victory.

Meanwhile, on the singles side, two-time Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek swiftly dispatched Rebecca Sramkova with a score of 6-0, 6-2. Swiatek is set to face former US Open champion Emma Raducanu in the next round. *—PTI*

Balaji and Reyes-Varela showcased their prowess by hitting 23 winners compared to their opponents PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Sitanshu now India's batting coach; Nayar in hot seat

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Former Saurashtra batter Sitanshu Kotak was on Thursday named India's batting coach ahead of the upcoming limited-overs series against England and the Champions Trophy next month after assistant coach Abhishek Nayar's performance came under scrutiny during the tour of Australia.

The 52-year-old Kotak is a longtime staff of the National Cricket Academy as its batting coach. He has been on tours with both the senior and A teams during past few years.

"It is clear that Abhishek Nayar's expertise isn't helping the players. Kotak has been a specialist batting coach for a lengthy period of time and has also got the trust of the players," a senior BCCI official told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

The Indian batters were found wanting on the technical front in Australia with Virat Kohli's outside the off stump troubles becoming a recurring problem.

Kotak was considered a dogged left-hander during his in domestic cricket, where he amassed over 8,000 first-class runs, including 15 hundreds, in 130 appearances.

During the tour of Australia, the legendary Sunil Gavaskar had questioned the role of the Indian support staff by saying that they should be held accountable for the persistent technical issues of players like Kohli. *—PTI*

Barcelona advances in Copa del Rey

BARCELONA, 16 JAN

Barcelona maintained its winning momentum with a resounding 5-1 victory against Real Betis in the Copa del Rey round of 16 on 16 January. Following their impressive 5-2 triumph over Real Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup final, the Catalan side continued its strong form, marking their fourth consecutive victory in 2025.

The match at Montjuic Stadium saw Gavi and Jules Koundé score in the opening half-hour, with Raphinha, Ferran Torres, and young star Lamine Yamal adding to the tally in the second half. Dani Olmo, who joined Barcelona after a long registration battle, played a pivotal role in Gavi's third-minute goal. Koundé had a second goal disallowed for offside just before half-time, a fate that also befell Yamal shortly after the restart.

Raphinha opened the second-half scoring with a breakaway goal in the 58th minute, followed by Torres finding the net shortly after his introduction. *—PTI*

Barcelona's Jules Kounde celebrates after scoring his side's opening goal during a Spanish Copa del Rey round in Barcelona PHOTO: PTI

Lyon falls to Amateur in French Cup; PSG prevails

PARIS, 16 JAN

Amateur side Bourgoin-Jallieu pulled off a stunning upset by defeating five-time champions Lyon in a penalty shootout to advance to the last 16 of the French Cup, igniting jubilant celebrations among home fans who invaded the pitch.

Facing fellow amateurs Espaly, defending champions Paris Saint-Germain faced a tougher challenge than expected. They conceded an early goal but equalised through Warren Zaïre-Emery. PSG then took the lead with a strike from Désiré Doué, only for Maxence Fournel to level the match at 2-2. s—*PTI*

SPORTY SUPERMOM

Chandigarh roots inspire Aus Kho Kho captain

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Sonam Garg used to play kho kho during her school days in Chandigarh but the mother of a nine-year-old never thought in her wildest imagination that she would lead Australia, her country of residence for 10 years, at the World Cup, currently underway here.

"I was born and brought up in Chandigarh and moved to Australia 10 years back after marriage. I used to play in India during my school days but that was 20 -22 years," Sonam told PTI Bhasha.

"So when I heard about the Kho Kho World Cup, I got really excited as it took me back to my childhood memories. I contacted the kho kho committee (in Australia) and joined the team. Soon, I became captain of the side," said the 30-year-old finance professional.

Australian women's Kho Kho team's Indian origin captain Sonam Garg, right, plays a match at the Kho Kho World Cup PHOTO: PTI

Sonam's first challenge was to strike a balance between her family, job and sport.

"I have one nine-year-old son and it was hard to strike a balance between a full-time job, house and hobby. It was not easy but I did it with the help of my supportive husband and son.

Although Sonam's son is an avid cricket fan, he has started enjoying kho kho. He literally cried when the Australian women's team lost the first match against England.

Sonam said that in a sports-loving and multi-cultural country like Australia it was not difficult to build a team from scratch even for lesser-known sport.

Sonam said she had mixed feelings when the Indian men's cricket team lost the Border-Gavaskar Test series to Australia recently.

"Being an Indian-origin Australian, how can we not love cricket? My son loves the game and he supports India. I was there at the MCG for two days rooting for Australia.

Despite her support for the Australian cricket team, she is a big fan of Indian pace stalwart Jasprit Bumrah. *—PTI*

India's Rayhan finishes T-27 on Korn Ferry Tour

PARADISE ISLAND, 16 JAN

India's Rayhan Thomas put together four under-par rounds and finished T-27 in his first start as a member of the Korn Ferry Tour in the United States.

The 25-year-old Dubai-born Indian, who turned pro last year and registered a win on the Indian PGTI Tour, shot rounds of 68-68-66-69 to total 9-under 271 at The Bahamas Golf Classic at Atlantis Paradise Island.

Thomas had three birdies against two bogeys in his final round 69.

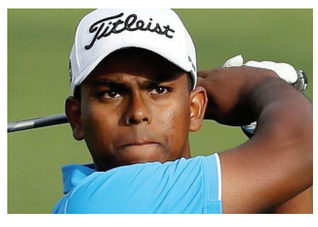
American Hank Lebioda earned his first Korn Ferry Tour title, beating S H Kim of South Korea with a birdie on the first playoff hole at The Ocean Course in the 2025 Korn Ferry Tour season opener.

Lebioda, who was diagnosed with Crohn's Disease as a college freshman in 2012, has always demonstrated a fighting spirit in his professional golf pursuits.

Lebioda shot 66 in the final round for a four-round total of 18-under 262 to overcome a four-stroke deficit to 54-hole leader John VanDerLaan (76), who slipped to T-9.

Kim, who played the last two seasons on the PGA TOUR, shot a final-round 63 to make up a seven-stroke deficit and earn his spot in the playoff.

The top 20 on the Korn Ferry will earn a PGA Tour card for 2026. *—PTI*



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